



DELHI UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

DELHI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

CL. No 01.3NBE:2 G6

Ac. No. 172848

Date of release for loan

This book should be returned on or before the date last stamped below. An overdue charge of 5 Paise will be collected for each day the book is kept overtime.

SEP 17 1971

15 MAR 1974

~~JUN 13~~

~~5 SEP 1948~~

~~- 4 DEC 1976~~

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

L'AFFAIRE JONES

"Gorgeous from beginning to end."—GERALD GOULD
(*Observer*)

"Can be read in a flash of amused enjoyment."—
HAROLD NICOLSON (*Daily Telegraph*)

**"Perhaps indeed Mr. Bernstein provokes more laughs
than Mr. Beerbohm."**—EDWARD CRICKMAY (*Sunday
Referee*)

"I laughed loudly and would not stop."—LIONEL
HALE (*News Chronicle*)

"What a joy to have a good laugh!"—RICHARD
CHURCH (*John o' London's*)

"Infinitely entertaining."—L. P. HARTLEY (*Weekend
Review*)

"Don't miss it!"—C. E. BECHHOFFER ROBERTS
(*New English Weekly*)

"Overflowing measure for amusement."—A. G. MAC-
DONELL (*Bystander*)

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

By
HILLEL
BERNSTEIN

Author of
"L'Affaire Jones"

LONDON
VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD
1936

Printed in Great Britain by
The Camelot Press Ltd , London and Southampton

***“ Choose a bright morning
and see The Hero ”***

Choose a Bright Morning

I

IT SEEMED to me that an efficient spy system ought to work both ways. Almost any government spy can discover the presence of an enemy, but it takes a really good spy to find a friend. Governments usually search for their hidden enemies; they let their friends go to the trouble of announcing themselves. But in Bidlo, as I had heard before arriving there, it was different. Two hours after a visitor's arrival in the capital the government knew all, and was prepared to act in several ways: imprison, expel him; have a parade in his honour, declare a national holiday; or let him be. Even when nothing was done about him, it could not be ascribed to oversight or indifference; it was definite policy; a decision had been made—"We will do nothing."

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

I was decidedly a friend. A foreigner who donates to another country a statue of its national hero is always welcomed with official cheers; especially if the foreigner is an American. Nothing is too good for him. My statue was already in the capital and standing upon its base. It was not yet unveiled, and I had come for the dedication ceremonies. But I did not announce myself. Accepting in advance the efficiency of the spy system, I thought it might be pleasanter and more interesting to be discovered. It would be a matter of just a few hours. The spies would investigate and report me; the authorities, duly excited, would rush to greet me; there would be speeches and banners, a procession to the palace of The Hero, a reception by the great Winsatz himself; then, festivity upon festivity, and finally the dedication.

There was, indeed, plenty of evidence of the spies. The breed was recognisable. I watched them for the better part of a day as they prowled through the lobby of the hotel and as they conferred in whispers, sometimes with hotel

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

employees and sometimes with one another. But it struck me that they were notoriously slow. Certainly there was sufficient material for them to work upon. My identity was a matter of official record; the hotel, in accordance with police regulations, had required my passport when I registered. My rooms had been searched. I had given the spies personal opportunities, too. From one or another as he prowled I borrowed a match, or else I mistook him for somebody I knew. Such conversation as resulted was fruitless; although I mentioned Americans once and statues several times, there was no sudden lift of the eyebrows, no thrill of recognition, no rapid exodus to spread the tidings.

I was practically doing their work for them, and nothing happened. Neither delegations, nor official greetings, nor military escort to the palace. Nothing. Apparently the praises of the government espionage had been oversung; it was only the usual one-dimensional affair. I might stay there for ever and remain undiscovered. That would not do.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

I announced my presence to the government. My first call was at the palace of The Hero. There a polite official informed me that The Hero was not granting personal interviews. If I wanted to be received I could join a group of tourists to be shepherded by the American Embassy; I must apply to the Ambassador and be vouched for by him. "But I am not a tourist," I protested. "I have given you my name. Surely you know who I am."

"Of course," he replied. "You are the donor of the statue of Orsatz-Winsatz. Just the same, it will be necessary to see the Ambassador." He bowed and quickly left me.

So different was this from the reception I anticipated that it left me bewildered and angry. There had been so much genuine enthusiasm over my original offer of a statue. A noble gesture and a brilliant conception, all had agreed; it paid tribute to the first great hero of Bidlo and to the militant contemporary leader who was his spiritual descendant. It had not been brilliant for nothing; I had had four sculptors working at it

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

in Paris. I was hailed as the true friend of Bidlo, the great American whose munificence and understanding would never be forgotten. Such enthusiasm continued as the statue was completed and shipped; they found an excellent site for it on a hillside overlooking Dornsatz, the capital; they lost no time in putting it in place, and in planning the dedication ceremonies.

In view of all that, the present official attitude was inexplicable. Join a group of tourists if I wanted to meet a man whom I had honoured in marble? Make an application to the American Ambassador? There must be some mistake.

The Propaganda Ministry, I felt, would set matters right. I had had correspondence with this Ministry. Extraordinary things were said about the genius of its Minister, Brunsatz, and the wonderful organisation, developed by him, which made Bidlo hero-minded. There, where efficiency reigned, one might expect a more fitting greeting. The Propaganda Ministry would not slight a hero-minded American who brought a marble gift glorifying both Bidlo and heroism. It would

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

arrange with despatch the personal interview between Winsatz and myself. Also it would administer a stinging rebuke to the palace official who wanted to isolate The Hero from those who had every right to meet him.

To the Propaganda Ministry I went. It appeared every bit as active as it had been reputed to be. So much bustle and energy, such zeal in the faces of men who hurried through the corridors, so many officials, agents, couriers, aglow with purpose and in haste to perform it. It was reassuring. I asked for the Minister. Mr. Brunsatz was not at liberty, but his assistant, Mr. Kopsatz, would receive me. I saw Mr. Kopsatz, and noted at once that his greeting was anything but effusive. His salutation was perfunctory, he turned his eyes away, seemed furtive, even embarrassed. With some heat, I related to him what had happened at the palace.

He did not speak at once. I waited. Then he said, "We know nothing about the statue."

I stared at him, incredulous. "Do you mean to tell me that you know nothing about a statue

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

which was to have been dedicated by The Hero himself, in the presence of 300,000 men, the Cabinet, the Diplomatic Corps, with the ceremonies broadcast and filmed, and with the day declared a national holiday ? Those were the very plans of your Ministry."

He still maintained that he knew nothing. "But you have seen the statue, haven't you ?" I persisted.

"I have seen that there is a statue on Orsatz Hill," he admitted, "a statue which was not there before."

"Well ?"

"But I have no idea how it got there. You see, we have no papers for it. No records of any kind."

"Oh ! You have to have papers and records in order to believe your eyes."

"Without the papers, we cannot recognise the statue," he declared.

"This is the most amazing thing I have ever heard," I said, my anger mounting. "Let me ask you something. Suppose you had the papers, as

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

you call it, for the statue, but you didn't have the statue. Would that please you more ? ”

“ It would be more in order,” he said.

“ You are hiding something from me,” I said. “ What you are daring to suggest, in all these incredible excuses about records, is that The Hero has not put an end to paper-shuffling. Did he not call upon the clerks to cease paper-shuffling and become heroes ? Did he not organise and make heroes of them ? Have you the effrontery to suggest that the paper-shuffling persists, and in the Ministry of Propaganda, of all places ? ”

“ It has been abolished, I assure you,” he replied. “ We look upon the past with contempt. But I do not know how to explain this unfortunate mishap.”

“ Listen to me,” I said grimly. “ I am Keets Wilber. Perhaps you will recognise that, if you do not recognise the statue. Before I had this statue executed, I received written assurances from your government that you would be delighted to accept it. I have had correspondence with this Ministry about it; a date was even set

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

for the dedication. The statue arrived ; your government not only accepted it, but put it in place. Now, what has happened ? Your Hero, to whose glory the statue is consecrated, will not even receive me ; I am told to apply, as a tourist, to my Ambassador. And you plead ignorance. You tell an improbable story about papers. There is something strange and unbelievable in this. What is the truth ? ”

“ I can only repeat that we know nothing about it,” he declared, with finality. “ Try the Ministry of Fine Arts. Try the Ministry of the Interior.”

I did. Everywhere, furtive faces when I appeared and made inquiries ; everywhere, pleas of ignorance. Yes, we’ve seen the statue. No, we know nothing about it. Try some other department. My patience was exhausted. But I could read between the lines ; their embarrassment told me more than their words. These pleas of ignorance and incompetence, of absent records and paper-shuffling, were but masks for the real facts. There was a conspiracy afoot, and it was directed against me and my gift. It must be of recent

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

origin, or they would not have gone to the trouble, first of encouraging me, then of accepting the handsome statue and putting it up on its selected site. Who or what was working against me?

Because of a profound feeling that the age of the great heroes had returned to this earth, I had decided to consecrate myself to a hero. History is always in the making, but this was more than history. This was Jason, Hercules, Siegfried, Ulysses, Beowulf, St. George. This was Orsatz and his spiritual heir, Winsatz. The golden age, I felt, was upon the world again; the golden age in which legendary characters came to life, sprang up out of forest obscurity and made the world ring with the mighty blows they struck. For further thousands of years the future poets would be possessed of the stuff of legends and epics, based upon exploits which in our day were warm, living actions. At such a time it was not sufficient for me to be merely a contemporary. Existence only for the sake of existence was not enough.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

When such heroism was with us again, I wanted to be part of it, to know the heroes at first hand, participate in their struggles and joys, share their trials and their rude repasts.

It would not be true to say that I gave up everything in order to embrace the new life. For it was no sacrifice at all. I had never cared much for family, and less for business; I detested business and business people. One of my chief sources of pride was that I never concerned myself with my investments. There was a man in Wall Street to whom I had delegated authority, and his instructions were never to annoy me with details or try to consult me about transactions. He was well paid to use his own judgment and let me be, and he was more than worth his hire. For myself, I preferred a more worthy and interesting life. Nor could anyone say that I had not prepared myself thoroughly for it. No fat remained on my frame. For months I had hardened myself with exercise, eschewed luxury, brought myself to prefer a hard couch, and, above all, had channelled my mind into heroic thinking.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

Winsatz was my chosen hero. Like his ancient predecessor in Bidlo, he was a dragon-slayer, and this type of hero pleased me most. Winsatz came out of his forest and looked upon modern Bidlo. He called it a nation of clerks and time-servers (although under the designation of "clerks" he lumped a great many occupations not generally considered as clerical). He reminded the clerks of their heritage. They were the descendants of heroes, whom they had all but forgotten, except as legends relegated unjustly to the nursery. The dragon once more possessed Bidlo. It was time to bring Orsatz out of the nursery and back into life. It was time to be heroes again, to wield the sword of Orsatz and slay the dragon. Thus the hero movement was launched, and the clerks flocked to its banners. A conquering army they proved to be, and power was soon theirs, with Winsatz—The Hero—as head of the government.

I wanted to join this movement too. As a foreigner I required a gesture eloquent enough to win me immediate acceptance as a comrade of the heroes. That gesture was made in marble. On top

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

of Orsatz Hill stood the composite hero who linked the two magnificent ages of Bidlo, so that history and legend filled the living moment. The body represented the traditional Orsatz, in hunter's garb, sword in hand. But the head was that of Winsatz. Its symbolism was evident.

I burned with the desire to serve a cause. And I was told to apply to the American Ambassador and join a tourist group ! I had contributed a noble monument to Bidlite heroism. And I was informed there were no "papers" for it.

II

No, I would not go to the Embassy; not for anything. And I ceased calling at the Ministries. This mysterious official apathy was put on; certainly the government was not apathetic about anything else. Well, I could be apathetic too. I could wait. I accepted it as a challenge; saw it as a duel between myself and Winsatz (the others were unimportant). Patience, too, is the quality of a hero. Meanwhile, I kept in condition by going to a gymnasium and by taking long walks.

Returning from one of these walks, I met Parker. He was the correspondent for an American newspaper and wanted information; for several days he had been trying to reach me. I had always thought that reporters asked questions and then waited for the answers. But Parker, as I pointed out to him, talked a great deal and asked few questions.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“ I know next to nothing about you,” he said. “ Except that you’re the husband of Mrs. Keets Wilber. We all know about her. But you’re a kind of mystery man. There’s nothing in any of the standard reference books—Who’s Who, American Clubmen, Directory of Directors, and the rest. It’s amazing how many Americans prefer to remain silent powers. They never appear in the annual lists of those who rule America ; they leave all that to Charlie Schwab. He’s doing a pretty good job ; don’t you think so ? ”

I assured him that I had no power that I knew of, silent or otherwise. In any case, I preferred to remain silent. “ That’s all very fine and noble,” he said, “ but it’s not the way to behave in Bidlo ; not for the donor of a statue, anyway. There’s a lot of noise here and you have to shout to be heard. You know, I’ve met donors of statues before, but you’re the first one who wasn’t surrounded by a staff. You ship a statue here without a personal representative to meet it at the station. You haven’t even got a press agent, and I understand you’ve been calling at all the Ministries and

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

introducing yourself, without any preliminaries. You'll be read out of the Society of Donors of Statues to Nations. And in dealing with government officials, you can't be a simple democrat with ascetic tastes. They don't understand it. You must send heralds, envoys and cup-bearers before you. Their job is to prepare the canopies, brass bands, and red carpets.

“ What you want is a demonstration at the railway station when you arrive. Then, two or three thousand men running through the streets and shouting, ‘ He's here ! He's here ! He's here ! Who's here ? Keets Wilber's here ! Who's Keets Wilber ? You ignoramus ! Don't you know Keets Wilber ? He's America's most powerful American and Bidlo's most sincere friend. Why, of course I know Keets Wilber. He's a friend of my aunt in Schenectady. Hurrah for Keets Wilber ! ’ Then you begin sending messengers to the government. You send them in relays, and each relay announces, a little louder than the previous one, ‘ Keets Wilber is very busy. He cannot be seen. He cannot receive. He has a cold. The noise of

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

motor traffic bothers him. The service at the hotel displeases him. He will probably take a midnight train out of Dornsatz. He sends his regrets, but he cannot see members of the government. He will probably not arrange an American loan for Bidlo. He will probably go to Linkau.' That will be enough. In an hour the streets around your hotel will be cleared of motors. The hotel personnel will be packed off to a concentration camp. An official delegation will arrive with scrolls, accompanied by a regiment of grenadiers and a band which plays the 'Star-Spangled Banner' excruciatingly. You will be persuaded to visit Winsatz immediately. The hero waits impatiently."

"You talk a lot," I said.

"That's the way I get my information. Seriously speaking, if you had had a press agent, he would have attended to all that. Why don't you hire Larry Mulden? He's footloose here. Good man. He once created a pacifist lobby on behalf of munitions manufacturers. It gave the munitions lobby something they could put up a patriotic

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

fight against; they got all the patriotic societies behind them. Larry enjoyed that, because he really was a pacifist at heart. His pacifist propaganda was very good, and the munitions people paid for it. They wanted him to be ineffectual, of course, but Larry believed in earning his salary. He wasn't so good at manufacturing Red scares, though; I suppose it was because he didn't believe in Santa Claus any more."

"You said you wanted information," I reminded him. "But instead your real purpose seems to be to find employment for a friend."

"I always try to help my friends, and it never interferes with business," he replied. "I do want information. Have you seen Winsatz?"

"I have not."

"It would have been interesting to learn your opinion of him."

"Since you like to talk, suppose you tell me your opinion of him."

"I've never met him," said Parker. "It makes me very jealous. He never sees people who might have legitimate business with him, such as

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

correspondents who are stationed here. But he receives all the visiting firemen. Buncope, the American Ambassador, runs what you might call a regular tourist agency. He takes parties through about three times a week to meet The Hero. Whenever an American gets arrested here for taking a deep breath of Bidlo's air, Buncope can't be bothered with him; it serves the fellow right and he can rot in jail. But when it comes to presenting important tourists to The Hero, Buncope is right on the job and he loves it. Everybody loves it. Oh, yes, the trains run on time in this country."

"The trains run on time," I repeated. "I have heard that remark before."

"And the beggars have been chased away from the museums and churches. And the radicals have been crushed. All the home folks tell it to Winsatz, along with the prayer for a Winsatz in America."

"Why should he want to receive so many tourists?" I asked.

"What's the use of being a dictator if you can't

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

meet a lot 'of interesting people?" he replied.

"It's all due to the free seed crisis in America."

"Free seed crisis? I don't understand."

"Congressmen, you know, used to be able to send free seeds to their constituents. It was a proof of legislative alertness, to be rewarded on Election Day. But that practice has been stopped. As a substitute, the Congressmen give their constituents letters to Ambassadors in dictatorship countries, so that the Ambassadors will arrange for the home folks to meet the dictator. They love it. All this dictatorship needs is a guide book by Mr. Baedeker or somebody. Choose a bright morning and see The Hero. Be sure to stand two paces from the north window, and you will note that world-famous heroic glint in his eye. Better than Giotto.

"Three aunts of mine have told me all about it. They got in via the Congressman, via the Ambassador, and afterward they were very patronising to me, just a newspaper correspondent stationed here who has never met the dictator. I don't even know about the trains.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“ Then there was the time my big boss arrived. As a newspaper publisher, my big boss couldn’t cover a two-alarm fire and no self-respecting copy-reader would pass his copy. But he saw Winsatz and got what he called an interview, although I would call it something else. ‘ Send that,’ he said coldly, letting me know he had succeeded where I had failed. Then he cabled the paper to support Winsatz editorially, as his policy was O.K. and it wouldn’t be a bad idea for America to have a Winsatz. I think they spent about four minutes together. Two minutes for trains, and two minutes for beggars. It ties my hands a lot, I can tell you.”

“ I think you are very unfair to the government,” I said. “ You newspapermen are a cynical lot.”

“ Maybe you’re right. So why don’t you try to see Winsatz ? That is, if Dayton Gribbs will let you get anywhere near him.”

“ Dayton Gribbs ? ” A chill came over me suddenly as I heard that name. “ Is Dayton Gribbs here ? ”

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

"The name means something to you?" asked Parker, smiling.

"I don't know him. But of course I know who he is."

"He's been here over two weeks. Arrived just after your statue did, by the way. And he captured Winsatz right away. Another triumph! Carsten Sills was here too. Between the two of them, they represented about sixty-six decorations, all the way from Siam to Montenegro and all the way from the Purple Eagle of Afghanistan to the Little Brown Hen of Jugoslavia. But Sills didn't have a chance. Gribbs charmed The Hero and froze out Sills right away. Gribbs wants no rivals muscling in on his racket. He's the only real original collector of kings and dictators, although how he charms them is too much for me. Gribbs is at the palace every day. None of your tourist groups, either. Long private interviews. Poor Sills finally admitted defeat. Left here to get a decoration in Portugal."

Horrible suspicion gripped me. If Dayton Gribbs were here . . . If he were friends with

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

The Hero . . . Could it be possible that . . .

I did not know Gribbs, but had heard of him. Who had not? He was an American resident of Paris who made a career of knowing kings, ex-kings, and dictators. His life revolved around them, and he was always making visits. They appreciated his tireless devotion, his unflagging interest in them. No detail of their lives was too unimportant for his attention. He would visit every locality associated in some way with their pasts, would interview former nurses, governesses, gardeners, schoolmates. The resulting memorabilia he compiled into fat, loving volumes published at his own expense. Such devotion did not go unrewarded. He had garnered most of the available decorations. The practice of honouring him had even spread across the Atlantic; governors of three states, including Kentucky, conferred honorary colonelcies upon him. Wherever he went, all his decorations went with him, also his colonel's uniforms. He dabbled in wood-chopping, too; that is, he was a member of a distinguished fraternity of Americans who chopped

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

wood with various ex-kings in their exile. This group, sarcastically dubbed The Lumberjacks, also The Rail-Splitters, was the most exclusive of American clubs. It was not how you chopped your wood that mattered; it was who you chopped it with (true enough of most clubs).

One of those ex-kings—his name and kingdom escape me—apologised to him for no longer being able to bestow a decoration upon him. Dayton Gribbs handled that situation well. Borrowing the royal axc, he took a moderate chop at his thumb with it and then held up the bleeding hand for his Majesty's inspection. "Your Majesty," he said, "that is all the decoration I desire, a decoration I will always cherish."

His anecdotes and reminiscences of the royal and the super-great were much in demand upon the infrequent occasions when he visited America. They provided a thrilling evening, with an exhibition of the axe-scar as a climax. But he brooked no rivals. Any hostess who also invited Carsten Sills was immediately cut from his list.

This was my formidable antagonist; the man

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

who had free access to The Hero while I was relegated to the group of the Congressmen's "constituents," the former seed patrons of the Department of Agriculture.

"Let me tell you about Dayton Gribbs's first meeting with Winsatz," said Parker. "Gribbs likes a military setting, and knows how to contrive one. His meeting with The Hero was arranged for the day after he arrived. But Gribbs sent word that his valet had packed the wrong clothes. His formal morning attire had been left behind in Berlin, and instead the muddled valet had packed his military uniforms. Would The Hero mind if the Colonel came in military garb? Well, it developed that The Hero would not mind. He, too, had uniforms. As the commander-in-chief of the army and navy he could be anything sartorially that he liked, from private to full general, from apprentice seaman to admiral. No trouble, for instance, about being a colonel. So the two colonels met, and what was very important—from Colonel Gribbs's standpoint—they were photographed. What could have been finer? Gribbs's

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

valet has packed the wrong clothes for half the countries of Europe.

“The Colonel, incidentally, skated over thin ice very well. Before the meeting one of Winsatz’s functionaries called on Gribbs to ask him what battles he had fought in, and he also asked him to describe the engagements. When two military men meet, it is no more than common courtesy for them to compliment each other on their valorous exploits. As a Kentucky Colonel, Dayton Gribbs was hard pressed. He pleaded modesty, and turned over the flunky to his press agent. Joe Briggs did a swell job, although he didn’t tell his boss as much. So the good Colonel was a little surprised when Winsatz began talking about the bloody Kentucky War between the Moonshine and Revenue Armies, in which Colonel Gribbs routed the Moonshiners in the Battle of Churchill Downs. But Gribbs got through it all right. He was embarrassed, red-faced and inarticulate, which seemed to Winsatz like the modesty of a great commander. R. E. Lee or U. S. Grant couldn’t have done any better.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

Joe Briggs was fired, of course. We gave him a dinner."

I could not endure the suspense any longer. The blood was mounting to my head. "Tell me everything, and quickly," I said. "You know what I mean."

He smiled. "You've been sunk without warning," he said. "As soon as Dayton Gribbs saw that statue, he went to work on The Hero. There hadn't been any objection to it before; they were glad to get it, and were working on a big programme for the dedication. National holiday and so forth. But Gribbs didn't like it a bit. When he captures a dictator, he doesn't want to share him with anybody. Well, he hadn't routed Carsten Sill just to leave the field free for you. He told Winsatz plenty. You were a nonentity; a man without prestige; even a sort of joke. It would have been all right if Mrs. Keets Wilber had donated a statue, for she was well known and respected; you were only her husband. The statue, besides being poorly executed, was ridiculous. It would have made The Hero a laughing-

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

stock abroad. I agree with him there, of course; it is ridiculous. There's no proof that Orsatz ever existed, outside of the works of poets. As for Winsatz being his modern counterpart, The Hero is just a smart demagogue who organised the clerks.

“ Anyway, you can imagine the effect on Winsatz. He had been wildly enthusiastic about the statue; thought it did him no more than justice. But when Gribbs made him see the light, he was furious. He had all the dedication plans cancelled, of course, and at first he even wanted the statue dropped in the river or thrown on the dump-heap. But that might have been just as bad as dedicating it; an international scandal. So I suppose nothing will be done. It's a bit embarrassing having you about, but it is expected that you will grow weary in time. Well, that's the story. If you ran into a lot of dumb faces at the Ministries when you were inquiring about your statue, you know why.”

“ I'd like to meet that man Gribbs,” I said.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

"You can," he said. "He lives right in this hotel."

He seemed very eager that we should meet. I was determined, however, in such an eventuality, to control my temper. I had not come to Bidlo for a squabble with Dayton Gribbs; would not risk larger objectives for the petty satisfaction of teaching this meddler a lesson.

I did meet Dayton Gribbs the next day, and I controlled my temper. Again I was standing with Parker in the lobby when Gribbs approached. Parker introduced us. I fought with myself to keep my hands in my pockets.

When Gribbs heard my name, he gave me a cold glance and then turned away. "I've been wanting to see you for several days, Mr. Gribbs," said Parker. "I've been commissioned to do a magazine article about you. The *Saturday Evening Post*. Would you mind calling off your titles for me, and I'll put them down. I know some of them, but I want to check them."

"Here?" said Gribbs. "Not very private, is it?"

"Well, the article won't be very private either,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

if two million people read it. And don't mind Mr. Wilber; he's just home folks. Besides, Mr. Wilber has the faint stirrings of ambition in him, and I'm sure it will perk him up a lot to hear what a real career is like."

"I don't mind at all," I stated. "In fact, I'm very interested."

Gribbs began First, the honorary colonelcies. Heraldry followed. It was a long and honourable recital, beginning with Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour, continuing through Commander of the Crown of Roumania and Officer of the Order of Osmania, and ending some twenty-five titles off "Is that all?" Parker asked. It was not. There were still his writings—books about dictators—books about ex-kings—eight in all. "Finished?" asked Parker. He was not. He still had not listed his clubs, and proceeded to do so, in a strong and triumphant voice. I lost count.

It had been very impressive. I once read a description of the funeral of Wellington in which all his titles were cited, and it sounded just like

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

that; or the coronation of a monarch. All Gribbs's recital needed was the accompanying roll of drums. "Now, what about your directorates?" Parker asked.

"I don't harp on those," Gribbs said. "I have a few, of course," and he listed half a dozen. "But I'm really not a business man," he added. "I take very little interest in business."

"Well, here's Mr. Wilber, who's not a business man either, although I imagine he's a bit of a silent power. How about it, Mr. Wilber? Any directorates, or decorations?"

"No decorations, no books, no clubs, no directorates," I replied.

"No hits, no runs, no errors," said Parker.

Gribbs seemed pleased, as if through my own lips I had convicted myself of mediocrity. "Equality is one of the fictions of democracies," he said. "All men are not equal."

"It seems so," I said, with admirable self-control.

"Funny, that you two hadn't met before," remarked Parker.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“ I do know Mrs. Keets Wilber,” said Gribbs.

“ I both respect and admire her.”

“ A noble woman,” I said, with extraordinary self-discipline. “ She has suffered much.”

He agreed with me.

III

PARKER came to me with news. "It's hot news, too," he said. "After many Councils of State, it has been decided at last that Winsatz will receive you. He is in rehearsal now, going over and over the momentous speech intended for your ears only. I just got this flash from a friend at the Propaganda Ministry, and I hope you're excited."

"Will the statue be dedicated?" I asked.

"You have a passion for sticking to the main point, haven't you? Well, this has nothing to do with the statue. This is a private reception by Winsatz. Just you and he together. I wonder what you'll talk about."

"I do not know what he will talk about. I can only speak for myself. I will talk about the statue," I said.

"Don't be too sure of that. You've heard of that famous long room at the end of which The Hero

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

stands and waits. The walk up that room is supposed to have a psychological effect on you. No matter how important you feel at the start, you are reduced to a zero by the time you arrive. You are morally overpowered. You don't know what to say. The Hero has you under control. You say what he wants to hear. He wants to hear about the trains."

"If the room were twice as long," I said, "I would still talk about the statue."

"Can I count on that? Because the idea of this interview is to get rid of you gracefully. They hope to buy you off with a reception. You will be thanked, of course. You will be complimented as a friend of Bidlo. As for your gift, it is highly appreciated, but the international situation being what it is, there has been, unfortunately, a change in plans. It may not be possible to have an unveiling for another six months, possibly a year. They should love to have you remain in Bidlo, of course. Your presence is stimulating and inspiring. But you are a busy man, no doubt, and have plans which call you elsewhere."

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“ I am not busy and I will stay,” I said.

“ With such firmness, you ought to be a dictator yourself. Maybe what America needs is not a second Winsatz, but a first Wilber.”

“ America’s needs are something for America to worry about,” I declared.

“ I know what you mean,” said Parker. “ You are going to talk about the statue. Well, good luck.”

An Envoy arrived from the Propaganda Ministry. Mr. Brunsatz would receive me that afternoon at four. There would also be a reception for me at the Ministry.

I went. Brunsatz greeted me and was all smiles. Words of praise and appreciation poured from him. Then he said : “ I have a wonderful surprise for you. The Hero will receive you privately to-morrow afternoon. He is anxious to honour you for your thoughtfulness, and to learn from you the sentiment about him in America.”

“ I don’t know anything about the sentiment in America,” I replied. “ Dayton Gribbs can tell him that.”

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

He looked surprised. "Oh, yes; Mr. Gribbs," he said quickly. "We know Mr. Gribbs."

He led me into a room in which a hundred Ministry clerks were waiting. This was the reception ! The arrangement resembled that of a lecture hall. There were many chairs for the clerks, and in front was a platform, with a table and a couple of chairs. Brunsatz introduced me and poured forth more complimentary language.

"Let us now show our appreciation of our distinguished visitor from across the seas," he concluded.

The clerks cheered and gave the hero salute.

"I have been asked to say a few words," I said. "Perhaps it would be better if I told a story. There was once a government functionary who mislaid a railway station. He distinctly remembered having left it in the upper right-hand drawer of his desk. But it was gone. He reported the disappearance to his superiors, who were disturbed. Two days later another functionary reported a serious theft. Ten locomotives and two hundred freight-cars had been stolen from a filing

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

cabinet. Naturally, the secret police were called in. But the thefts continued. Passenger-trains disappeared from a card index; trackage and roadbeds were filched from folders. Well, you can imagine what a hubbub the office was in. Everybody passed sleepless nights; everybody quarrelled; each was suspicious of the other. The secret police asked for a bigger appropriation, so that it could hire more agents to unravel the mystery.

“Then one morning someone appeared with a startling report. He had seen the missing railway station. He had also seen the missing trackage, the locomotives and cars. In fact, they were all in operation !

“From that moment, the agitation was intense. Apparently someone had taken the papers representing the plans for a railway and had actually constructed it. The functionaries were indignant. They had not yet finished shuffling those plans to their hearts’ content. They wanted the road dismantled, reconverted into the original paper, and the paper returned to them.

“The situation did not rest there. The ancient

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

woman who cleaned the office at night came forward and confessed. Alone in the office at night, it was her pleasure to go through the files and note what progress had been made. Now, those railway papers always disturbed her. You see, the railway had been built twenty years before and in the office they were always planning to build it some day, if the clerks could ever agree to release the plans. The old woman knew. She lived in the suburbs, and for twenty years she had come to work every evening on one of the trains of that railway. Night after night she looked at those precious documents; night after night she wondered when her secret would be discovered. For, if it should be learned that she was travelling on a road which had not yet been built, the functionaries might try to prove on paper that she had never really come to work, that she did not exist; and no existence, no salary. In her mind, therefore, the problem offered only one of two solutions; either destroy the railroad, which was too difficult for one of her age, or else destroy the plans, which was easier. So she removed the

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

incriminating evidence and burned it. Later she was burned as a witch and the office prepared a new set of plans, still for the same railway.

“This happened a long time ago, so none of you need feel guilty. If the story has any moral, it is that the plans may not be indispensable. Perhaps the railway already exists. Or even the statue.”

My story was not too well received. “Interesting,” said Brunsatz, without much enthusiasm. The clerks went back to work, and I departed.

I walked the streets all evening and all of the next morning. I did not want to see Parker or anyone else.

Through the streets marched thousands of heroes. Songs and cheers; uniforms in profusion; constant saluting and clicking of heels; banners everywhere, and radio loud-speakers bringing the message of heroism to the people. Heroism—that was what I had come to Bidlo to seek.

The next afternoon I drove to the palace. A cordial and impressive reception this time,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

although it did not make me forget the chilliness of my first call there. The official who referred me to the American Embassy was present. He seemed to have forgotten his previous attitude, and did everything he could to convey warmth and welcome. "I have not been to the Embassy," I told him. "Which Embassy?" he asked, blankly. "The Patagonian," I replied. "It is only a Legation," he said in correction.

I went up the stairs between two rows of guards in brilliant uniforms, all of them presenting arms as I passed. My name was shouted up from one squad to another, "Mr. Wilber to see The Hero! Mr. Wilber to see The Hero!" Finally I reached the crucial door, opening upon that long room which was supposed to reduce one to insignificance. A guard flung open the door, and I entered. It was indeed a long room.

At the other end of it, near a window, stood Winsatz. He looked so characteristically like his photographs that you could have picked him out from among a million. He radiated fame, authority, and all kinds of destiny. About his head there

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

was an aura of publicity, the overwhelming cumulative effect of so many photographers, so many journalists, mass meetings, parades, speeches, tourists. His jaw attested the historical will of thirty million Bidlites. Everywhere in Bidlo you could see clerks emulating the thrust of that jaw; some even made careers of it. His lips, those lips from which millions of words of denunciation had poured, were tightly shut, as if no word, either of praise or of blame, should escape them now. In his eyes was the light of destiny. You saw the forest reflected there, Orsatz with his sword, dragons in retreat, an army of clerks with banners.

My long voyage had reached its principal objective. Here was the man towards whom I had been moving through actions and vicissitudes, some of which were even obscure to me. I had reached him by way of a block of carved marble, but that had only been an instrument, a means of introduction, a visiting card, nothing more.

He stood there grimly watching me as I

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

approached. He said nothing. It was therefore up to me to say something.

“Are you Mr. Winsatz?” I asked.

“What!” he cried. “What did you say?”

“I asked you if you were Mr. Winsatz. I have an appointment to meet Mr. Winsatz. Are you he?”

He looked for a moment as if he would explode. He glared, his eyes popped. He took a step forward, then two back. Then he circled me, with his eyes never leaving my face. “I have seen some strange animals,” he said, “but——” Then he roared: “Am I Mr. Winsatz? And what if I am? I don’t know anyone else who is Mr. Winsatz. So this Mr. Winsatz whom you seek—perhaps it is I.”

“In that case,” I said, “if you are Mr. Winsatz, I have a message for you. Your trains are running on time.”

I thought he would leap at me, he seemed so furious. “Oh, they are, are they? The trains are running on time. Good! That is a message. What else?”

“You have cleared away the beggars from in front of the churches and museums. You have

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

restored order. You have crushed the pestiferous radicals. Everything is quiet. What we in America need is a Winsatz. True, our trains are already running on time, but they are not political enough."

"Sit down !" he ordered. He yanked at a chair and banged it down near me. I sat down. He continued to prowl all about me. "I have seen all kinds of animals," he said. "They come here and look at me, as if *I* were the spectacle. At last some one has arrived at whom I can look. You are the prize of the lot. You American millionaires have too much money. It makes you eccentric. Like your Mr. Carnegie, with his peace palace, and your Mr. Ford, with his peace ship."

"Some of us are eccentric," I admitted. "Some of us even give statues."

"How much money have you ? " he asked, ignoring the thrust.

"I do not know. I have never counted it. People who are in business count their money; they want to know whether they have made a profit. But I am not in business."

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

"Then you must be very rich indeed."

"I suppose I am. In any case, I have enough for my needs. Anything I require, I write a cheque, and it never comes back unpaid. Would you like to see me write a cheque?"

"No! I take your word for it that you can write your name."

"Anyway, I did not come here to discuss my wealth. I prefer to discuss my heroism."

"Your heroism! That should be very interesting. A millionaire's heroism."

"Yes. I have taken to the heroic life, and I wanted to attach myself to a real hero. I thought you were that hero. Like Orsatz you are by reputation a slayer of dragons, and I prefer dragon-slayers to all other types of hero. Better than anything else I should like to stalk a dragon, or many dragons. That statue——"

"Oh, yes, that statue. What about it?"

"I don't like it," I said.

"*You* don't like it. Well, why did you give it? Why did you force that ridiculous thing upon us?"

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

"It was all done in good faith," I replied. "It represented Orsatz and you as the two dragon-slayers, the ancient and the modern. But I have been forced to revise my opinion. No self-respecting hero, no slayer of dragons, would care to be associated with someone like Dayton Gribbs. No real hero would receive delegations of tourists and be flattered by references to the train schedule. You are wasting your strength, Mr. Winsatz. You are not slaying dragons. Look at me; I am prepared to lead a hard and rigorous life; there is no fat on my frame. But you have become flabby. Mr. Winsatz, and there is even the suggestion of a paunch. Reduce the fat, Mr. Winsatz, and slay the dragon."

"I have heard just about enough from you," he said.

"No, there is one thing more," I persisted. "After I have finished, you can ring for your guards and have me dismissed. I am a hero, and therefore I will say anything. What I have to say to you is that your government is not as strong as it should be. You are represented as being a

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

strong and fearless dictator, but in reality you have become no more than a figurehead. Other men—your supposed subordinates—are the real rulers of the country. They are running the government in fact, and perhaps later they will run it in name, too. There is your dragon, Mr. Winsatz.”

He pressed a button, savagely. There was time for one more remark before the guards arrived, and I made it. It was an allusion which I had been told would upset any dictator.

“I don’t want to give statues to a Kerensky,” I said.

I did not wait to note the effect upon him, but turned brusquely and left. If I was in danger, I exulted in the thought. Outside I got into a taxicab. Instead of returning directly to the hotel, I had the driver cruise about the town. I wanted time to think out a plan. Finally, I had the driver stop at a hardware store. There I bought a twenty-pound sledgehammer and a folding ladder. We drove next to Orsatz Hill. There was my statue, conceived in heroism but donated

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

unwisely. Only a minute was devoted to rueful cogitation upon the outcome of my pilgrimage. The next minute I had my ladder up, mounted it, and with the sledgehammer I pounded away at the head beneath the canvas. A few mighty blows, and down it came.

I was arrested, of course. I held off a small mob with the hammer, and when the police came I surrendered. "Don't look for the plot," I said. "I am alone responsible. That statue was my gift to the nation. I have withdrawn my gift."

A committee of heroes questioned me at the police station. After convincing themselves of my identity, they tried to argue with me. The statue was no longer my property and I was no better than a vandal. "I know what you want," I said. "You want this kept a secret. But I shall announce publicly the withdrawal of the gift. I shall not be silent."

They conferred among themselves, and the nature of their dilemma was plain to me. If they expelled me from the country, I would talk. If they imprisoned me, the scandal would surely

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

come out. If they did nothing, it would be regarded as weakness; other outrages might follow.

They showed, however, more resourcefulness than I gave them credit for. They shipped me off to a concentration camp, and in the commitment papers they entered me as "Stephen Kornsatz, an individualist flouting his duties to the state. To be converted and reformed."

IV

AT THE CAMP they did all in their power to beat the individualism out of "Stephen Kornsatz, individualist." Whips, clubs, fists, inquisitorial questioning, harangues—none of these aids to conversion were spared. "Individualist!" they cried. "Tell us the names of your accomplices." I was stubborn.

I did not like to be beaten. Since it was unavoidable, I chose to take it as a test of my heroism. Those who beat me were regularly recognised members of the Hero Party, but for the moment it was I who was obliged to be the hero, not they. If in their trickery they had forced a new identity upon me, I must be strong enough to fight them with that very identity. So I was "Stephen Kornsatz, individualist," and I defied them. "Yes, I am an individualist," I cried. "Down with likemindedness.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

Down with all slavery of regimentation. Down with serial numbers, alphabets, uniforms, censorship, propaganda, ideology, national destiny, racial destiny, totalitarianism, and all other eyewash."

"He is indestructible," they complained. But that was an exaggeration. Some of their beatings were perfunctory, no more than a sort of daily ritual, but after each serious attack, when they really put their minds and hearts into the performance, I was a hospital case for several days. While I was in bed, recovering, they hovered about the bedside and demanded the names of my accomplices, or they sent a professor to try to convert me.

"You will see the light," the professor used to say. "Just as I have seen the light. I, too, was an individualist; I laughed at heroism. But I have been converted."

"With a club?" I asked.

He ignored my question. "I have been converted and am now a hero. For too long a time we have been soft and tolerant. We must be

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

brutal. And we must report to the government anyone who is not brutal."

"And save our own skins?" I asked.

"We must be indifferent to human suffering," he went on. "It does not matter. A few months ago I might have been sorry for you. I might have signed a letter of protest. But that was sheer individualism. Now I am indifferent to your suffering, and I hope you will be indifferent to mine."

"Just give me the opportunity," I said.

They grew weary of beating me as an individualist, so they found fresh enthusiasm for their work by turning me into a Communist. "Tell us the names of your Communist accomplices," they demanded. I accepted that designation too. "Down with capitalism!" I cried. "Down with the bourgeoisie and the profit system. Workers of the world, unite!"

When they wearied of me as a Communist, they whipped me in rapid succession as a bourgeois, a landlord, a Catholic, a pacifist, a believer in Christianity, a foreigner, and a war veteran.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

"You have omitted one thing," I said. "You ought to whip me as a hero."

"No, we are the heroes," they corrected me.

"Well, you have forgotten to whip me as a Jew," I pointed out.

"There are no Jews in Bidlo," was the reply.

Little by little they wore down my physical resistance, although spiritually I was still strong. From the last serious attempt at conversion, I must have remained unconscious for almost a week.

But when my brain cleared I learned that there had been many startling changes during that week. Even in a concentration camp news travels.

With one bold stroke Winsatz had cancelled hundreds of his subordinates and co-workers. Many were executed, others were in concentration camps, others had fled. The firing-squads had been busy. In our camp, the director and many of his staff, including the professor, had been shot. There were new men in control now, not only in our camp but throughout the

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

country. For a week I was not beaten. The office records were in confusion, many were missing. Before beatings could recommence, the filing system had to be reorganised. It was a welcome respite. Clerks worked day and night to put the system in order.

Apparently, no record existed for me. I offered to write one, but the pleasure was denied me. The new staff inspected me, and it was said that I would be transferred as soon as I was sufficiently mended.

In their view I must have mended rapidly, for the very next day I was removed. In my state I cared very little. I remember nothing of the journey, of how long it took or through what sort of countryside we passed. Nor was I much aware, during the next few days, of my new surroundings. When again I was ready to take stock, I considered the current setting. I was in what appeared to be a dormitory, along with half a dozen others. There were French windows through which one stepped out to a small lawn with a couple of flower-beds. No one

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

spoke to me, and for a while I was grateful for that.

Finally one man approached and asked me if I were Hitler. I denied it. It appeared that the other occupants of the room were Mussolini, Metternich, Bismarck, Cæsar and Ivan the Terrible. I called an attendant and demanded an immediate interview with the director. So insistent were my demands that I did get to see him. And I told him that I wanted to leave at once.

“You ought to be very glad you are here,” he said. “This is the one place to be at the present time. There has been no revolution here, no upheaval. Everything is quiet. You can have any sort of opinions you want. Millions of people would be envious of your luck if they but knew of it. All the world outside is mad, but only here you will find peace and tranquillity.”

“I don’t care for peace,” I persisted. “I am a hero, and I need strife. Send me anywhere, even to another concentration camp, so long as I leave here.”

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“If you are a hero,” he said, “this is the place for you.”

He would not consider letting me go. However, he did consent to separating me from the dictators, although he suggested I might find them rather interesting. “Just think,” he said, “they claim never to have heard of Winsatz. They deny his existence; they even deny knowledge of Bidlo.”

Since the pressure of the challenge to be “Stephen Kornsatz” had been withdrawn, no further reason remained for upholding that individuality, and I determined to return to my rightful heritage. “I am Keets Wilber,” I told the director.

He assured me that quite a few persons recently were claiming to be Keets Wilber, and that he could do nothing about it. Bewildered, I persisted in my statement, but it only made him smile. “You might as well say you are Hitler or Charlemagne,” he said. “All the world is looking for Keets Wilber. About twenty of them have turned up, but not one was genuine. We are growing weary of these claims.”

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

Unaware of any reason for such fame, I felt he was mocking me. I told him about the statue, and how I had decapitated it with a sledgehammer. "But that is not so," he declared. "It was The Hero himself who did that. He announced that the honour was too great, that it was too much for any living man to be compared with Orsatz. All citizens of Bidlo should try to be like Orsatz, but no one citizen should claim the honour exclusively. The statue should remain headless until Bidlo had attained all its objectives, until the nation was entirely heroic. Every man must feel that he is doing all in his power to make his own head worthy of the honour. The Hero announced this in the greatest speech of his career."

"If he actually did as you say," I remarked, "it is evident that I must have underrated him. But why is Keets Wilber so famous?"

"Keets Wilber is an international issue," he explained. "He has disappeared. Enemies of the régime have spread rumours abroad that the government liquidated him because he was opposed to the decapitation of the statue. The

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

government maintains that Keets Wilber favoured The Hero's act, that he was the sincere friend of Bidlo and The Hero. If harm has come to him, it has come from enemies of the régime. There is much agitation in America and other countries. The diplomats are busy. Meanwhile, a national search has been conducted for Wilber. It will be greatly to the government's advantage to find him alive and friendly. It will defeat all the propaganda from abroad."

"Then, if you are a patriot," I said, "here is a chance to win your country's gratitude. I am Keets Wilber." He laughed. I argued, pleaded, showed him my birthmark. "You will do better to say you are Tamerlane," he said. "I have too much experience. And even if I could bring myself to believe in your claims, I should do nothing."

"Why?" I demanded.

"Do you think I want to make the government aware of my existence? In times like these, it is best to be forgotten. And how do I know what is really behind all the furore? Perhaps

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

the last thing they really want is the return of Keets Wilber. Perhaps the man who brings him back, thinking he will get a medal for it, will be put up against a wall and shot. It has happened to more than one man who thought he was performing a service for his country. As for myself, I prefer to remain as inconspicuous as possible.

“ Not that I think for one minute you are Keets Wilber. It is my opinion that he has been killed by agents from Linkau, in order to create enmity between Bidlo and America. The Linkites do not want Bidlo to have any foreign friends.”

He would not be persuaded

Nevertheless, my moment came. A shipment of new inmates arrived from concentration camps. There were so many of them that little space or comfort remained for the older inmates. The overcrowding made for conflicts and quarrels. One day the director said to me, “ We are becoming like the outside world. Peace and tranquillity are gone. We are overpopulated. We

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

must have room. These men are Bidlites. You are a foreigner. Our motto is 'Bidlo for the Bidlites.' They come first. Therefore, if you want to leave, no one will prevent you."

For once I did not argue with him.

V

THERE proved to be no difficulty in convincing the capital that I was Keets Wilber. One minute after I put my head inside the door of my hotel, the lobby was a picture of excitement and joy. Manager, clerks, porters, bell-hops, rushed to greet me, and there was a rapid exodus of spies to spread the news that I was back. I asked for Parker, telephoned his office, but could not locate him.

Never had I seen a government act with such dispatch. Within half an hour a delegation arrived from the Ministry of Propaganda. The Minister was waiting in his office for me, they announced, and they wished to escort me there immediately. (Later I learned that he was anxious to see me before any of the foreign correspondents reached me and induced me to talk.) I did want to see Parker, but since he was nowhere

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

within communication, I agreed to go with the delegation.

As I walked through the lobby on my way out, I saw Dayton Gribbs standing there. He was a picture of impotent rage. I gave him a careless glance, regarding him as a piece of unimportant scenery, and turned to my companions.

At the Ministry, Brunsatz was effusive. He hopped about, he shrieked with delight. "This is a happy hour for Bidlo," he said. "When you disappeared so mysteriously, there was confusion and treason. But The Hero acted boldly. Having crushed all treasonable elements, Bidlo marches forward gloriously to her destiny. The Hero's lightning stroke of wrath lacked only your presence, to appreciate and approve it. The foreign journalists are mischievous and slanderous. They claimed that we were responsible for your disappearance. They dared to insinuate that you had disapproved of The Hero's act in removing his head from the statue, and that because you disapproved the government determined to silence you. What did they not say? They spoke of

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

abduction and murder, even that you had been included in the list of those liquidated by the state. It has been very distressing to combat all these devilish rumours, but we fought back bravely and with confidence, which has now been rewarded. All our enemies have used your absence as an opportunity to attack us. But we had full faith in you. It was unthinkable that you, whose friendship we value so highly, could have been harmed in any way by us ”

There was no end to his emotion. Finally, I asked him what was the next thing on the programme. “ The Hero will be overjoyed to receive you,” he said “ The Hero does not receive many people now ; he is practically inaccessible. In solitude inspiration comes to him It is imperative that this god of ours be undisturbed in his heroic reflections. But he always has time for Keets Wilber. It shall be this very afternoon.”

“ You say The Hero does not receive many people now ? ” I asked.

“ Practically no one,” he replied.

“ Not even Dayton Gribbs ? ”

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

"The Hero has not received Dayton Gribbs since the day you disappeared," he said.

"I shall be pleased to meet The Hero once more," I said. "He is much more interesting to me now than he was previously."

"Interesting?" he repeated with a look of disappointment and reproach. "'Interesting' is hardly a word to describe The Hero. With the millions of words which we have at our disposal in this Ministry, we cannot do him full justice. You will see not a man but a god."

He was positive about that. "It will also be helpful," he added, "if you give out a statement after the meeting. I shall inform the press and the correspondents to be prepared for it. This Ministry will see to it that your words reach all the millions of Europe and America. Thus the world will learn the truth. The Hero and Keets Wilber are friends. As for the rumours that the government was responsible for your disappearance, they are base lies. The government lamented your inexplicable departure, and it welcomes you back as its devoted collaborator.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

And now that you are safely among us once more, we can dedicate the statue of Orsatz as it should be dedicated, in the presence of its donor and in the presence of The Hero. Previously it was a little difficult for The Hero to officiate, because his head was on the statue. Now he can make one of his rare public appearances and thrill millions with a powerful speech."

I agreed to make a statement. Then I asked him how his Ministry was doing. He welcomed the question. "There has never been anything like it before," he said. "Propaganda is our first line of defence. If you were to ask me whether I would rather have a powerful fleet of battle-ships, a mighty force of aeroplanes, a far-flung system of fortifications, or a Propaganda Ministry, I should say: Give me the Ministry. Let the generals wear their uniforms and quarrel about tactics, about infantry or artillery. The army at my command is more powerful than any of theirs. If I decide to-night that the people of Bidlo must have a certain thought in their heads at 9.45 a.m. to-morrow, I give the word. Exactly at 9.45 a.m.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

to-morrow there will not be a head in Bidlo to which my thought has not penetrated. Where is the general who can do as much? Why, try as he will, the Minister of War cannot get anything into the heads of his general staff. And the general staff has the same difficulty with division commanders. Everybody misunderstands everybody else. But there are no such mistakes in my Ministry.

“ I keep telling the Minister of War that he ought to let me use my propaganda on his army, but it only makes him jealous. I have given performances for his benefit. In his presence I have said to subordinates, ‘ I want one hundred thousand heroes on the parade ground to-morrow afternoon. I want every one of them to be thinking of pork chops.’ The next day I go to the parade ground with the Minister of War. There are the hundred thousand men in hero uniforms, standing at attention in the straightest ranks, and all of them with even the same expression on their faces. I proceed up and down the ranks on my inspection with the Minister of War, and for his

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

benefit I ask questions. What is your name? Pork chops. How old are you? Pork chops. Where were you born? Pork chops. How long have you been a hero? Pork chops. What do you regard as your duty? Pork chops. It made my colleague very angry, for he could never influence his army as thoroughly as that. Only one man failed me. He was confused in his thinking. When I put a question to him, he answered he was hungry. When I asked another, he still answered he was hungry. He will never be hungry again."

He was a little man. He gestured violently as he recounted his triumphs; he displayed immense satisfaction with his powers.

"And that is not all," he continued. "There are the editors and journalists. They used to think in their conceit that they had an opinion of their own, but they also say 'Pork chops' when I want them to. Just as a test, give me an idea. Make a sentence, any sentence, and I will show you something."

"The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog," I said.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

"It shall be in every paper in Bidlo tomorrow," he assured me. "With full editorial comment. And the professors in the universities will lecture their classes about it. Oh, it is a marvellous instrument, propaganda. Press, radio, film, theatre, university, school, home—everything, in fact. Even our little children. You should hear them sometimes, after we have decided to impress something on them. Ask some of them if they want a stick of candy. 'I do not want a stick of candy,' the little ones will reply. 'I want a big navy with 18-inch guns. I want poison gas for our enemies.' Wonderful, don't you think so? Think of something the little ones should think about, and I will show you."

"Moth balls," I said.

"They will think about it this week," he assured me.

A functionary reported that he had been in communication with the palace and that The Hero was ready to receive me. Brunsatz and I got into a car. The Ministry had worked fast. Outside the palace gates were several thousand uniformed

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

heroes, as well as half a dozen photographers; I was saluted, cheered and photographed. A few minutes later I again faced the door opening into that long room.

I hesitated for a moment before entering. It was a moment of mental preparation, during which I sought to bring up again the memory picture of that room and its occupant as I had first seen them. But when the door was opened and I stepped inside, my moment of reflection and preparation proved to have been of no value whatever. I was shocked, bewildered, numbed.

The room was darkened; nothing was visible at first. Up ahead, where I expected to see a dictator, I saw nothing but a cloud. Now what, I asked myself, was a cloud doing in a room? And was The Hero behind that cloud? I stood and thought about it, as the odour of burning incense assailed my nostrils. Then the words of Brunsatz came back to me: "You will see not a man but a god." Was this what he meant?

"Advance!" someone cried from a distance.

I advanced, more in response to the command

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

than to any decisiveness of my own. But soon I was confronted with a solid bank of incense-cloud, and I halted. Not that I was afraid, but I preferred to consider the situation. After all, I had had no previous experience with clouds at this low altitude. But my hesitation was soon over. There was no retreating now, and heroism surged back into me. Whatever was behind that cloud-bank, I would penetrate to it. I recalled another hero, Siegfried, penetrating the ring of fire which encircled the sleeping Brunhilde. Like Siegfried, however, I should have preferred to have a sword. But sword or no sword, the command (my own command) was forward !

I plunged through.

There was The Hero at his desk, waiting for me. He looked completely changed. Was he a god now ? The Hero of that first interview had seemed conscious of millions gazing upon him, even when he was in a room with only one other person. But the present Hero appeared to be a brooding spirit, lost in timeless reveries. (Some-

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“Where are you, My Hero?” I cried.

No reply. “Are you in the forest with Orsatz?”
I shouted

Still no reply. “What does Orsatz say?” I asked.

The Hero finally spoke from within his cloud.
“It is not enough to slay the dragon once,” he declared. “He must be slain many times.”

“Very true,” I agreed.

As the vapour lifted, I found myself once more with The Hero. He had returned from the forest. His eyes were ablaze; they burned into me. “Although you come from a different country with different gods, you have an understanding of the spirit of Orsatz,” he said. “And it is sometimes possible for one from outside to see dragons which are invisible to the native eye.”

“Nothing would please me better than the opportunity to hunt for the dragon,” I said. “My time and my resources are at your disposal. True, I am not a Bidlite, but I hope I am a hero. I am prepared to make exhaustive research into the dragon situation and to present the results for your action. Regardless of the wiles and strata-

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

gems of the beast, I should find the means to track him down, to identify him, and to prepare him for the sword of Orsatz. You may consider me a volunteer for this service."

"I accept your proposal," he said.

I went from him, feeling that I had work to do; work and a mission.

Brunsatz submitted a draft of the statement which was to be issued in my name. It was well enough as far as it went, but I wanted an additional comment about the statue. I not only approved of the head of Winsatz having been removed, but in my opinion this was an improvement over the original conception.

VI

THERE seemed to be no doubt in Bidlo that The Hero had become a god. The transformation in the public attitude was amazing. Previously he had been regarded as a militant leader, a fiery demagogue, a modern champion of the spirit of Orsatz; but granted all that, the people still had looked upon him as one of themselves. That point of view was no more. Now he was surrounded with awe and mystery, and was worshipped. The land had gone mystic, as Parker observed, and the centre, the subject, the summit, of its mysticism, was Winsatz. No longer need he claim public support as a priest and prophet of the cult of Orsatz. It was enough for Bidlo that he was Winsatz, a god in his own right.

I understand, now, the necessity for a cloud. A god must be distant and inaccessible; those who have the privilege of communion with him are

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

the most fortunate of the earth. And because I was so favoured, and continued to be so favoured, I was the subject of feverish interest and speculation. The fact that I had returned safe and sound, after all the rumours and international agitation, was in itself a cause for interest and excitement. Much more contributory, however, was my continued association with The Hero, at a time when almost no one else enjoyed the privilege of seeing him. The press, domestic and foreign, rushed me with such frenzy that I was finally compelled to make myself more or less inaccessible. There were so many delegations from the various hero organisations and their affiliates. There were conferences with Brunsatz. There were the curious and the autograph-hunters. It was a little too much. All I really wanted from life was my daily interview with The Hero; my penetration of the cloud, which was always interesting, and discussion with him of the technique of dragon-hunting.

Those were exciting days. They were not, however, without annoyances. My interviews with

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

The Hero gave rise to all sorts of surmises and innuendoes which I took great pains to dispel. I was not an influence on The Hero. I did not represent a foreign group which was arranging a loan (that particular rumour, with its assumption that I was a business man, put me in a rage). I refused to state where I had been during my absence from the capital; it was nobody's business. When pressed too much, I merely replied, "I have been in the forest." I did not plan to become a citizen of Bidlo and go into the Cabinet. I was not a "mystery man"; there was absolutely nothing mysterious about me. And I must decline to furnish intimate personal particulars for the gratification of idle curiosity.

It should be of no public interest that I did not have a valet and put on my own clothes, that I took cold showers and exercised, that I ate very little, that I had no opinions on the future of women, that I had never been interested in sports; that I preferred Bidlo to any other country. If people had an insatiable curiosity about me, it was their own affair; I was not

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

obliged either to satisfy their curiosity or to reciprocate.

Absorption in my new situation did not blind me to the existence of an opposition which made itself felt in various subtle ways. Buncope, I knew, resented me, and Dayton Gribbs was jealous. Other contrary forces were more obscure; I suspected they belonged to the secret minority which objected to being made heroic, and which resented any foreign aid to Bidlo. Then there was Parker, whose attitude puzzled me. He had been friendly enough at first, but his air of being amused over my association with The Hero, his refusal to see the merits of the hero movement, did not please me. Although I could not imagine him in the same camp with the others, he was nevertheless capable, all by himself, of providing an uneasy moment.

It was Parker who started the press furore which made me an international incident. When I failed to return after my first interview with The Hero, he investigated; when the statue was found decapitated and the liquidation of hero

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

sub-leaders was achieved, Parker in his dispatches raised the matter of my disappearance, and the others took it up. He enjoyed embarrassing the government (for which he was later expelled from Bidlo). My return, of course, put an end to his performance. He forgave me readily for not being dead, and even found me an assistant for my dragon-hunt—Larry Mulden, of whom he had spoken to me earlier. At the same time, Parker was critical.

“You’ve gone over to the enemy,” he said. “You’ve swallowed heroism, lock, stock and barrel.”

“I have been interested in heroism for a long time,” I replied. “I do not consider heroism as the enemy.”

He was delighted over the loss of influence experienced by Gribbs and Buncope, but seemed by no means elated when I supplanted them with The Hero. I suppose he was by nature a chronic oppositionist. When he learned of my contributions to the funds of the different hero organisations and auxiliaries, he jeered. “More money

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

thrown to the racketeers," he said. "Why don't you give it to the real heroes? They need it more."

I asked him to explain what he meant by "the real heroes." He said: "The people you never hear about. The people who are opposed to heroism."

"Heroism is not an easy way of life," I said. "Naturally, there are people who prefer not to make the effort. No money of mine will go to such people."

Parker did not like mysticism; he inveighed against it. "What a people!" he said. "They make a god out of a dictator who grinds them down. How do you account for it, Larry? [He was talking to Mulden.] Only a few weeks ago he was just a triumphant demagogue who got control of the state. Lots of people wouldn't admit that he was anything but crafty. Now they turn around and worship him. Everywhere you go you hear people talking of Winsatz with awe, as if he were a god. Even the die-hard sceptics are falling for it. I've seen and heard some queer things lately. A confirmed cynic like Blanch, for

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

instance, giving you that twilight-in-the-forest look when he mentions Winsatz."

"Why don't you reread your own dispatches?" said Mulden. "The ones about Winsatz killing a few hundred of the hero boys. To become a god you must insist upon human sacrifices to yourself. To remain a god you must be indifferent to human life. It creates awe; it becomes mystic. Look up your dictators, the ones who became gods, and it won't be difficult to recognise how their godhoods were established."

"What has this to do with dragons?" I demanded.

"Very little."

"Then let us get to work," I said.

Parker laughed, for which it was difficult to forgive him. If he disliked heroism and mysticism so much, he could always go somewhere else. The government finally saved him the trouble of making a decision by expelling him.

There were several annoyances of other sorts. Buncope, for one, complained he had been put to much trouble on account of my disappearance.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

Two or three times a day during that period the State Department had cabled him demanding action; he was kept busy answering questions from all sides—Washington, the correspondents, the Bidlite government. Emma, too, had been cabling her heart out to him, begging him to find “her poor husband.” He was caught between the insistent language of the State Department and the indignant rejoinders of the Bidlite Foreign Ministry; he was forced to organise a search party on his own. It had been taxing and embarrassing, and Buncope was bitter. He was not above implying that I had contrived my own disappearance, for reasons which he left open to inference. Had I not declined to state where I had been?

“Next time you go to the country,” he said, “you might try to avoid an international crisis by leaving your address, or at least a telephone number. My staff has been overworked.”

I assured him that at no time would I expect him to assume responsibility for my actions or my security.

“It is a responsibility you cannot absolve me

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

from," he replied, coldly. " It is an official responsibility for American citizens, not a personal one ; it is a responsibility not to you, but for you. And let me say that your interference in the domestic affairs of Bidlo is no help either. It embarrasses the official American representative in the pursuance of his duties."

" Duties ? " I said. " You mean the presentation of tourists to The Hero ? "

He was resentful, I knew, because that particular activity of his was no longer encouraged. For this, no doubt, he blamed me.

But the surprise of surprises was a visit from Dayton Gribbs. Ordinarily the distinguished collector was not given to honouring the untitled, but he was a friend of Emma's, it appeared (Emma was very much titled in her own peculiar way), and she had been cabling him about me. He let me know quickly that the visit was not to be interpreted as any sort of personal recognition ; it was only because of Emma.

" Your poor wife has been frantic," he said.

" What about ? " I asked. " Has she lost control

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

of another committee? Or has one of her press agents failed her?"

"I disapprove of your cynicism, sir," he said. "Please understand that this call is not due to any personal desire to see you. It is wholly at the behest and in the interest of Mrs. Wilber. The poor woman appears to be in a state of collapse. Her anxiety for your safety has broken her down physically. Her nervous system is shattered. Reporters have not left her a moment's peace. They constantly pester her for interviews about you."

"It would certainly put her into a state of collapse to be interviewed about anyone but herself," I said. "That is one thing which has never happened before."

"You are making this errand very difficult for me," he complained. "Nevertheless, out of loyalty to Mrs. Wilber, I shall go through with it. You ought to go back immediately and look after her, old man. She needs you."

"That is very noble of you, and I appreciate it," I said. "I have not seen Emma in two years,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

and she has been free all that time to call it desertion and take legal action. Nor have I heard from her in two years, although I do not complain about that. Of course I have had news of her. Once in a great while my financial agent cables me, and says that she has tried to interfere in his management of my affairs. I cable him to pay no attention to her. That is her only interest in me. And now she has a collapse and I am expected to rush to her. I resent her collapse ! She cannot do a thing like that to me ! ”

“ This is one of the most disagreeable experiences of my life,” he said. “ I should not have undertaken this commission.”

“ I agree with you there. And I know why you did it. Emma wants to get me away from here because she can't stand my prominence. And your reasons for desiring my departure are too obvious to mention. Well, I will not leave, under any circumstances. It's too interesting here. The Hero is inspiring company. Have you ever met him, by the way ? I don't think I could arrange it for you to meet him.”

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

He gave me a venomous look. "Good-day," he said.

There was opposition of a different sort. I received threatening letters. They were treated with the contempt which they deserved. One or two anonymous communications even hinted at blackmail. And there were also the spies, who were as industrious as ever, although it was impossible to tell whether they were spying for me or against me, or what they expected to find.

Returning to my hotel suite late one evening I was startled to find that I had a visitor, unexpected and uninvited. Reclining on my divan was a young woman, attractive and alluringly clad. She was as casual and self-possessed in her manner as if she actually belonged there. For a moment I thought I had made a mistake and had entered the wrong place; my instinct was to apologise and back out. But as I looked about, my doubts vanished. It was my apartment.

She smiled invitingly and said: "Good evening."

Under other circumstances and in other places,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

I might have been cordial, but my suspicions were immediately aroused and I was on my guard.

“Who are you and what are you doing here?” I demanded.

“Waiting for you,” she replied.

“I do not know you and have no idea why you should wait for me,” I said. “But several objections occur very violently to me. First, why are you in my apartment uninvited, and who let you in? Second, it seems to me that if you considered it necessary to wait, you could have done it elsewhere and in a different costume. Third——”

“It’s about my brother,” she broke in. “I have a brother in Kansas City.”

“Oh! So that’s it. A brother in Kansas City! Well, I should like you to know that I have an aunt in San Francisco, another in Boston, another in Chicago, and——”

“Tell me about the one in Boston,” she said.

“I have aunts everywhere,” I continued, “but I’ve never broken into anyone’s apartment on that account.”

“An aunt, no. But a brother is different.”

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“Have you any idea how many brothers there are in Kansas City whose sisters never do such things? Would you like statistics?”

I went on in this way to give myself time to ascertain what her real purpose was, for it could be seen at a glance that her presence there was not the result of a mere whim. Something hinged upon this visit, and I wanted to know what it was.

“But I am so worried about my brother,” she cried. “He has not written to me for a long time.”

“I cannot understand why your family worries should bring you here,” I said. “Your brother’s shortcomings as a correspondent have nothing to do with me. Frankly, I don’t care if he never writes to you. And you might do your worrying somewhere else.”

She arose and approached me, with an appealing look on her face; she placed a hand on my shoulder. “I had hoped you would be sympathetic and understanding,” she said “I haven’t a friend in this world. And I have such a great

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

capacity for friendship. Please ! You must help me ! ”

Sobbing, she slipped both arms around my neck, and clung tightly to me. It was a difficult moment, for there was no denying that she was attractive and animated. If I were to free myself, I must do so quickly, while I still had my strength. Brusquely I put her away from me.

“ I do not like spies,” I said. “ And this invention of a brother is not very interesting. You will worry about him in prison if you do not leave here in two minutes ”

“ But you do not understand, you simply do not understand,” she wailed.

“ I understand perfectly. Come, now, you have two minutes to get out.”

“ Only two minutes ! ” she cried, bitterly.
“ You Americans are slave-drivers.”

“ Who sent you here ? ” I demanded.

She was silent and angry.

“ Whoever it was,” I continued, “ you can go back and tell him that I am not to be tempted, even by so charming and delightful a creature

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

as yourself. Not Venus or Kundry could tempt me at the present moment. I am a hero with a mission, and have more serious things to occupy my attention."

"Congratulation !" she exclaimed, smiling.

Of a sudden she became agreeable ; her whole attitude seemed to have changed. She walked over to the divan, picked up her bag and took from it a sheet of official-looking paper "Here is your certificate," she said, handing the paper to me. "Post it in a conspicuous place."

"What is this ?" I asked in bewilderment. I looked at the document. It was engraved and official, a certificate of the hero government. It stated that the holder, qualifying as a true hero, was impervious to the wiles of seductive women.

"What does this mean ?" I asked.

"You have passed the test," she replied. "I congratulate you."

"Who are you ?"

"I am a soldier of the state," she said proudly, lifting up her hand in the hero salute. "I am an

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

official temptress. The Hero wants to be certain that his most trusted collaborators are not weak. I test all the higher heroes."

"An unusual occupation," I commented. "But does it require the issuance of a certificate?"

"There must be certificates for everything in Bidlo," she answered. "The ordinary hero must have twenty-two certificates for various things, and they must be posted conspicuously in his home, so that all can see that his fidelity, ancestry, and bravery are unquestioned. The extraordinary hero requires thirty-six."

"What happens to those who do not pass the test?" I asked.

She smiled, and her eyes became languorous and amorous. "Of them we shall not speak," she said.

She was indeed alluring. As I stood there and looked at her, I felt unsteady. My senses began to swim.

"You have two minutes to get out of here," I said, harshly.

The next day I moved out of the hotel and

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

rented an apartment where such intrusions were not likely to occur.

Parker's friend Mulden was eager to assist me. "I've had nothing to do here," he said, "but as a spectacle it's too good to leave. That propaganda machine, for instance, is something that I can't see enough of. It's a press agent's dream come true.

"I've done a bit of publicity work off and on, but never with materials like this. A public relations counsel for a bank feels important and respectable; he has a glass-topped desk and all the efficiency gadgets; but there's no spur to his inventive spirit. He knows he can't get people to cheer themselves hoarse and throw their hats in the air for the First National Bank. A film press agent has a little more latitude. He can do something with Hollywood divorces and a couple of elephants. But his budget is limited. In the movies, extravagant as they are about some things, I've had bitter battles with the business office over hiring an extra dozen

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

sandwich men. But Brunsatz ! He just puts in an order for the whole country and it's delivered, and no protests from the auditing department. Even when he puts on an ordinary little show, just a routine demonstration, he teaches us all a lesson in the quality of bigness. Half a million supers as mob atmosphere and you don't even have to pay them or tell them when to cheer. Five miles of bunting. Five million words over the radio stations. All the bonfires and special street lighting he wants, and if he's keen for a really good blaze he even orders a couple of buildings burned down. And editors ! When I think of all the times I've had to plead, cajole, buy drinks, refer to the good old days when we were cub reporters together—and just to get a few measly lines of publicity in a paper about a friend or client. But Brunsatz simply says to the editors, 'Fill your papers with this.' And they do. It's either that or a concentration camp. In Bidlo the press agent has come to heaven. Mr. Brunsatz and I are going to be friends, I can see that."

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“That’s very interesting, no doubt,” I said, “but your work is to find dragons.”

“We’ll find them.”

Mulden did become friendly with Brunsatz. The Propaganda Minister told me that he appreciated the valuable counsel of my assistant and always welcomed it.

Our first move in the dragon-hunt was to establish headquarters. A suite of offices was rented and a clerical staff engaged. “What do you want with such a large reference library?” I asked Mulden when he ordered hundreds of books. “Do you hunt the dragon through books?”

“You can never tell about the dragon,” he replied. “He might have written a book or at least read one.”

I made no objections. But when he began collecting statistical reports of all kinds, it was time to call a halt. “Are we seeking a statistical dragon?” I asked.

“There are all kinds of dragons,” he said. “Statistical dragons, economic dragons, political dragons, social dragons, meteorological dragons,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

mythological dragons, military dragons, and dragons that are good for nothing but keeping on the mantelpiece. You never can tell which kind you are likely to find, and you must always be prepared. These modern dragons have to be fought with modern weapons. Statistics will help."

There was a private office for myself, an office for Mulden, a reception-room, and three rooms for library, filing cabinets, and clerks. Soon we were very busy.

VII

THE one thing I could not endure about my new situation was the cynical assumption by many that I was a business man, and that my association with the hero government was for purposes of monetary gain. Nothing could anger me more. Anyone who knew the background of my past knew that I had a violent antipathy to business and its devotees. Something of that past may well be indicated at this point, purely to clarify as well as justify my attitude.

I had always resisted business and business men. The prejudices went back to my childhood and youth. The only child of a family which had amassed a great fortune through three generations, I was constantly reminded that I must prepare myself for a sacred trust. My mission, my career, my occupation, my avocation, was to serve through life as the guardian of the family

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

fortune. As far back as I can remember, aunts, cousins, family friends, drilled the thought into my head, and so constantly that it came to assume the proportions of a boggy.

So much depended upon me. Three generations of Wilbers, tireless and single-purposed, had piled up this vast accumulation of investments. My duty was to devote my life to it, to exert all vigilance, so that the fortune might never diminish and always increase. This was the Wilber religion, and I was expected to be high priest, sacristan, principal communicant. To me it seemed like the career of a watch-dog, and from earliest moments of reflection I rebelled against it. Why have a fortune if I must spend my life guarding it? Let someone else do it. Hire someone. But my family could not see it that way. No, I must prepare myself to be my own watch-dog. Money disappeared if it was not looked after personally. My one duty in life was to keep the family fortune intact, and to increase it. "For whom?" I asked (a reasonable enough question, since I was the only heir). "And why is it a sacred

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

mission?" Such questions they regarded as outrageous.

A pleasant prospect was before me. There were so many different enterprises, investments, companies, that to keep track of a tenth of them would have been beyond my powers. But it was all in the training, my family said, and it was decided that my training must soon begin. I was to go from company to company, work in their offices, and "learn the ropes." So, against my will, I was put in the office of one of the corporations in which we were interested.

That first experience lasted one long painful month. I made no effort to assimilate the learning which so many were eager to impart. The staff of that office soon grew very weary of me. I jumbled the records in the files, threw important documents in the waste-paper basket, telegraphed the wrong firms, disrupted the organisation. The most interesting job there, as it seemed to me, was that of errand boy, for it took one outside the office. Occasionally I accompanied one of the

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

boys on his errands, and if it was a fine day I persuaded him not to return.

Telephone operator at the big switchboard was another of the more desirable jobs. Having learned how to operate the board, I often induced the regular operator to vanish for a little while and let me take the incoming calls. When there were too many at once, confusing me, I pulled out all the plugs and disconnected everybody. Half a dozen executives came raging out of their offices, but when they saw the future majority stockholder at the board they managed to achieve the semblance of a smile

They said afterwards that my stay there cost the firm many thousands of dollars. It finally became an issue: whether I remained or the staff remained. The office manager declared that it was impossible for the organisation to function while I was there.

That was a food company. My family thought that perhaps it was the product which repelled me, so they tried me next on aluminium, putting me into the office of another corporation. But I

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

cared as little for aluminium as I had for canned tomatoes. I disrupted that organisation too. The company was involved in a government anti-trust suit, and one day a reporter called to make some inquiries. I was the first person he saw and he put a question to me about the suit. I handed him all the documents on the case which I could find. The officers of the company were dreadfully upset about this, and I left soon afterwards.

By that time my family got the point. There were twenty other corporations in which I could have acquired experience for the management of my fortune, but they preferred not to go down the list with me. I might ruin them all.

So they let me go my own way, which was all that I desired. But the atmosphere was funereal upon the occasion of my twenty-first birthday. On that day the fortune passed legally into my hands and I became my own master. Never before in memory was there such gloom, such a foreboding of disaster. The Wilber dynasty was finished; ruin stared it in the face.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

My first act was to find a faithful watch-dog. His name was Hodson, but it could just as well have been any other name, for he came in serial numbers. He was loyal, he was honest, and he regarded the management of my interests as a sacred mission. It was truly a religion with him. Certainly he lived for nothing else. I never had to give another thought to my fortune.

Hodson was a happy man. He liked the pomp and dignity of the position, loved to appear as my representative at meetings of boards of directors, exulted in his prominence in business men's organisations and chambers of commerce, was thrilled with his importance in the councils of the Republican Party. These were the kudos of his position, but he never neglected the essentials. He was eternally vigilant in my behalf. From the start I had impressed upon him that all responsibility was his, and that he must never annoy me with policies or details. He must make decisions himself; I did not wish to be consulted at any time. Occasionally I did make an inquiry. "Everything all right, Hodson?" I asked him.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

And he replied, invariably, " More than all right, Mr. Wilber." My interest extended no further.

So far as I knew or cared, my fortune was not only intact but had increased considerably. Meanwhile, other young men of wealth, who prided themselves upon following every detail of their business interests, who sat all day in offices, dictated letters, watched the market quotations, and worried, had not done so well. They aged rapidly, while I had the heart of a child. It gave me a great contempt for business, which I did not regard as a serious occupation. It gave me a still greater contempt for business men, who regarded their occupation so seriously, as if it were the only thing in the world.

My prejudice took root, as I have said, when I was forced into an office. It grew when I proved so triumphantly that I managed money better than did most business men, simply by not managing it at all, by letting others do it or by letting the money manage itself. As someone remarked, " Money makes its own rules and takes its own path. People don't direct money, they follow it."

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

But as I grew older, my prejudices reached the stage of strong antipathy. I was always encountering bankers, industrialists and the like. Either they tried to interest me in their enterprises, or they delivered business sermons with a holy light in their eyes, or they endeavoured, unasked, to explain the intricacies of finance to me, as if it were a fascinating game which I ought to learn. Now I did not care one bit whether finance was intricate or not; the question left me cold. Since the game (if it could be called a game) was of no interest to me and the results were as satisfactory and unobtrusive as I desired, I found those business men pretty boring. It was as if they had insisted that I learn to play bridge when what I wanted was to climb a tree.

What was worst of all, however, what made me dislike them profoundly, was their way of searching simple actions for underlying mercenary motives. As I have said, I had the heart of a child. If something interested me, it absorbed me completely, regardless of time or place. If it suddenly possessed me to play with building blocks, I could

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

get down on the floor and do so. If it occurred to me that I might like geology, nothing mattered in this world but rock formations and fossils; I could scamper over rocks for hours and days. But there would always be people to say I was looking for gold, or oil. They would even be suspicious about the building blocks. "What's he after? What's his game?" That was the sort of thing I could not endure. It poisoned the air for me.

The latest manifestation of this type of mercenary suspicion added immeasurably to my anger. I was in Bidlo only because of my passion for heroism. My friendship with The Hero had for its common ground our joint interest in the dragon and the means for tracking him to his hiding-place. Yet there were business men who questioned the purity of these motives. They circulated rumours that I represented a financial syndicate which was arranging a loan for The Hero. They intimated that I was buying monopolies and concessions—the tobacco and match monopolies, the telephone and electrical concessions. They came to me with proposals;

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

wanted to "get in on it"; offered to write out cheques on the spot. Several even tried to bribe me to bring certain schemes to the attention of The Hero; they offered me blocks of stock if I would connive. A couple of them I threw out bodily; the rest were shown the door in record speed.

The Hero and I were as one in matters of heroism and the dragon. But we found that we also shared other interests. He disliked business men as much as I did, and this attached me to him more than ever. In fact, as our friendship progressed I was amazed to learn in how many respects we were similar, and it pained me to think that for a short period I had misjudged and underrated him. His ignorance of finance was almost as complete as mine, and his antipathy for its devotees just as great. In his youth, too, he had a brief experience in an office, and like myself reacted violently to it. "If I had remained in an office," he told me, "I would still be a clerk, perhaps a senior clerk by this time." He looked on Bidlo and found it full of clerks. Millions of them were employed and millions more

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

wanted to be employed. Clerks of banks, of finance, of advertising, of industry. Whatever they called themselves—salesmen, credit managers, auditors, advertising men, brokers, journalists, lawyers, professors—The Hero saw them as clerks. He refused to become a part of the system, refused to let himself be won over by its alleged attractions, instead, he decided, with the help of Orsatz, to overthrow it, and to transform the clerks into heroes.

Decidedly, as in my own case, it had not handicapped him to be ignorant of financial or commercial matters. And he, too, as I discovered, had the heart of a child. Without such a heart he would have been inconceivable. A child is direct, enthusiastic and tireless; has no patience with those who urge caution and mildness, cares little for the opinions of the timid and the humorous. If The Hero wanted to play with building blocks, he would get right down on the floor and play, Cabinet meeting or no Cabinet meeting.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

I wondered what Kelsatz wanted of me. He was Bidlo's chief industrialist and commercial leader, the principal representative of business. His secretary had asked for an appointment for him; said it was important and urgent.

Kelsatz came. He was effusive and complimentary for two or three minutes, and then plunged into the reasons for the interview. He said: "We business men of Bidlo feel that we ought to be allowed a full share in the direction of the government."

"I cannot understand why you see the need for making such a statement to me," I said. "That is a matter between you and the government. I am neither a member of the government nor a Bidlite. I am only a visitor who is interested in heroism."

"The Hero has become inaccessible," he said. "We have been unable to see him recently. But he sees you frequently. We understand that you are closer to him than even his own Ministers. But of course, that is not sufficient reason for troubling you. We come to you because you are

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

the one man who is capable of understanding the plight of the business men of Bidlo. You also are a business man."

"I am not a business man," I corrected him. "Let that be understood immediately. And, furthermore, since you have felt yourself free to broach the matter, may I say that heroism and business have nothing in common. They travel different roads."

"On the contrary, they have a great deal in common," he declared. "We financed Winsatz. We gave him the money with which to organise his hero movement. One hand should wash the other."

"That is a dangerous statement to make," I said.

"It is no secret," he replied. "It is well known. Ask any banker, any industrialist. They all contributed. Their accounts will show it. We financed the movement. All the newspapers and films, the uniforms, the barracks, the food, the motor-trucks, the demonstrations, the firearms—do you suppose they came from the air? No, they

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

cost money, and we provided it. Heroes cannot be heroes without a financial subsidy."

"Your claim does not awaken my sympathy," I said. "If you offered financial aid, you did so for your own purpose. If The Hero needed such aid and accepted, it was for his own purpose. The two purposes may not coincide. No doubt you spent your money in vain."

"Then that is a tragedy for Bidlo," he said. "For we are the most patriotic supporters of the government. We are anxious to contribute our share towards making the Winsatz government a great success. Without our co-operation it may not be a success. No government can be successful unless it gives a voice to the business point of view."

"I have heard that statement before," I said. "You would make the government materialistic. I despise all this materialism, all this emphasis on economics."

"So do I, so do all of us," he replied. "No one, in fact, deplores economics more. But what can we do? We did not make the situation materialistic; our enemies did that. We have done busi-

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

ness for centuries without feeling that business was materialistic. Then came the radicals, the Marxists and the others, and said business was materialistic, that everything was materialistic. At first we laughed at them; even our philosophers laughed at them. We tolerated them, too; and enjoyed the humour of their ridiculous statements. But they abused our tolerance; they persisted. Little by little they impressed their doctrines upon the uneducated, so that a great many of them became material-minded. You know what happened. So pernicious was their propaganda that even some of the business men, who had been happy for years in the belief that they were doing noble work, began to feel that there was something materialistic about making money. That is always the beginning of the end. Remember how the French aristocrats flirted with the ideas of Rousseau. But we business men of Bidlo had a reawakening in time. We launched a powerful campaign against materialism. We financed The Hero and his hero movement. And now, imbued with the fight against materialism, we

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

want to continue. Business has discovered that it has a political mission. Business, too, is heroic. But The Hero has been maintaining a strange aloofness. It puzzles and hurts us. Business is not adequately represented in the government. What are the Ministers of Finance, of Industries, of Labour? Former clerks!"

"I still don't understand why you come to me," I said.

"We should like our views to be made known to The Hero. We expected these Ministry posts to be given to members of our association. I ask nothing for myself. But the war against materialism must be led by business men. Even your compatriot, Mr Gribbs, says so. He addressed our association at luncheon yesterday."

"Then why not ask Gribbs to help you?"

The interview ended there. "I shall warn The Hero," I said to Mulden. "They want to get control of the government and make The Hero a figurehead. They want to use heroism for their own purposes."

"They never liked Winsatz," said Mulden,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“ but of course they supported him because they were afraid not to. Fear was the incentive then; they feared the radicals. Now the incentive is power. They’ve nothing to be afraid of now, but power is meat and drink and sweet music, and they want it actively for its own sake.”

“ Yes, I shall certainly put The Hero on his guard.”

“ There’s your dragon,” said Mulden. “ The dragon you’ve been looking for. A good one, too.”

The dragon ! Of course ! It had come to me without my recognising it! I hurried to the palace. “ The dragon has been found,” I announced to The Hero. Then I told him of Kelsatz and the plottings of the business men’s associations.

His indignation was inspiring to behold. “ I shall strike,” he said. He had been in a mystic mood when I arrived, but now he was the picture of action. “ Business shall not be permitted to interfere with heroism. Business must be put through a stern discipline, so that the iron enters its soul. Only then will it become heroic. If

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

terrorism is necessary, terrorism will be used." He sent for Brunsatz.

The Ministry of Propaganda went into action. In all newspapers and from all radio stations the forces of business were attacked. Business men were neglecting their duties to the state, and if this continued it would go hard with them. This was strict warning. As part of a heroic state, they had duties and responsibilities. They would not be permitted to shirk them. To make certain that they would not shirk, regulations would soon be announced which specified their responsibilities.

Day after day the attacks continued. I looked for something to happen to Kelsatz, but apparently he had gone into hiding. Then the new regulations were announced.

To prevent him from escaping his responsibilities, each business man was declared the official Hero for his own establishment. Hereafter no divided responsibilities would be permitted. Labour unions and their activities, such as strikes, made for divided responsibilities. Hence, labour unions were abolished and strikes forbidden. The

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

official Heroes of business were compelled to fix prices and wages themselves ; there were no loopholes of escape from that responsibility.

“ Business has certainly been put in a tight spot,” said Mulden.

I looked for new dragons.

VIII

I WAS to learn a great deal about the different ways for combating the dragon. First of all, the dragon had gone modern, and you had to fight him with modern weapons. The sword of Orsatz, wielded literally, did not suffice, but there were modern equivalents. You belaboured the dragon through the ether by way of wireless stations. You smeared him with ink on the pages of newspapers. You struck at him through speeches at mass meetings. You paraded against him. You used concentration camps to diminish his defence. You narrowed the trail to his lair by reporting your neighbours to the secret police. You poured streams of ideology upon him. You even sought to bore him to death through the lectures of government professors.

Your auxiliary St. Georges were teachers, professors, preachers, ideologists, secret police, and

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

rioting squads. In short, you enlisted all the facilities of the nation in the fight against him. In this way, despite the monster's many guises, you were sure to get him at some vulnerable point.

It took me a little while to reconcile these incongruities between the ancient and the modern. Mulden helped me. He proved a valuable aid not only to myself but also to Brunsatz, who thought highly of him. While I spent hours with The Hero in discussion of the dragon (although we referred to the beast mostly in the ancient terms), Mulden spent hours with Brunsatz in the consideration of propaganda methods. More than once Brunsatz⁴ told me of Mulden's helpfulness in making suggestions.

When I endeavoured to assimilate the differences between the ancient and the modern, Mulden offered to prepare a brief memorandum which he thought might help me understand the problems of Bidlo. This was its opening paragraph:

" Bidlo has an ancient history. It began in the forest with Orsatz slaying the dragon. It passed

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

through the historic eras of the tribe, the feudal barony, the principality, the monarchy, the republic. It progressed through all the stages from hunter to industrial capitalist. And now, in the culmination of its industrial period, it has returned, with Winsatz, to the sentiment of the forest hero--the rude hunter prowling through a forest of factory chimneys and eight per cent dividends. The sword of Orsatz is the symbol, but as a weapon it has been transformed into two modern equivalents. One is the propaganda system, which brings its influence to bear upon every inhabitant. The other is the military establishment--the army, navy, air force. The armourers are no ancient and antiquated Tubal Cains; they do their work through the issuance of stock certificates. The holders of these certificates are enthusiastic about the old Bidlo of the sword and hunting-horn days. They love to parade in the ancient hunting costumes, which have no pockets. But pockets are unnecessary, as stock certificates are kept mostly in bank vaults."

. There was a good deal more of it, and with

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

much of it I did not agree. It served, however, to make me aware of the contradictions; and perhaps it helped me to realise that contradictions were necessary. Without contradictions, there might not be sufficient impetus towards heroism.

It was fascinating to watch Brunsatz's anti-dragon system at work. The attacks on business increased in vehemence, and in the process some five thousand officials of the abolished labour unions were hustled off to concentration camps. It was clear now that business men would not be permitted to shift their responsibilities to others.

Brunsatz was tireless. He was eager now for another dragon. His dream was always to have several dragons on the waiting list, so that his "wonderful machine," as he called it, would never want for work, would never become rusty. As he explained it, "We must keep striking all the time. But we cannot always be striking at the same things. There must be a series of attacks, with quick shifts, when necessary, from one to the other. And we must always have something in reserve, with which to fill a dangerous

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

lull, an undesirable moment of calm. The worst possible situation is when a campaign must be stopped temporarily for tactical reasons and nothing else is available for a really hot attack."

Apparently he was in such a situation now. Business would soon be disposed of, and another dragon was necessary. He spoke of his problems to Mulden and myself as we sat in his office one day.

"If we could only import some Jews in a hurry," he said.

"Jews? What do you want them for?"

"In order to drive them out," he explained.

"In that case," I said, "why import them at all?"

"Ah, but they could be very useful between the time of their arrival and their departure. It's a pity. I thought once that my propaganda system was perfect, but now I realise that it is incomplete without Jews."

I asked for elucidation. Brunsatz said it was a technical question and would take too long to

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

explain. I turned inquiringly to Mulden, who volunteered to make it clear to me. "With your indulgence," he said to Brunsatz.

"Go ahead," said the Minister.

"Jews have a peculiar function in political history," said Mulden. "But it's a function they don't like. When a government is in distress, the Jews save it. They do it by serving as the official scapegoats, and in that way they become the targets for attacks that might otherwise be aimed at the government. They don't exactly volunteer for this service; it is rather forced upon them; they are unwilling heroes. If you are a Minister and have got your Ministry into a mess, blame the Jews, and you will escape the blame yourself. When your government is in a crisis and fears the people's wrath, make the Jews responsible for it, and the people's wrath will be diverted from the government and against the Jews. If you have started a war and are defeated, blame it on the Jews, and the people will forget your own part in it. And when there is a certain job that you want to put through quietly, without any public notice

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

of what you are doing, start an uproar against the Jews, and while that is raging nobody will have time to observe you achieving your real objective. It's an old policy and it rarely fails. Many a government has been saved that way. Is that correct, Mr. Brunsatz ? ”

“ That expresses it tactically,” said Brunsatz.

“ But Bidlo is in no trouble, it suffers no crisis,” I objected.

“ Nevertheless, I will always be unhappy because my wonderful machine has no Jews to work on,” the Minister said. “ If we had the Jews, we would never be at a loss for something to attack. We could always attack them. We could return again and again to the attack and be sure of success.”

“ But it is inconceivable that there should be no Jews in Bidlo. There are Jews everywhere.”

“ We used to have them,” said Brunsatz, “ but we drove them out. We invited them back and then drove them out again. We repeated this process about a dozen times. You see, there were a great many crises in Bidlo, and each

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

time they served their purpose. But the last few times they were invited they failed to respond. It's a pity. My wonderful machine could use them."

"Why not try inviting them again?" suggested Mulden.

"There would not be time. We need them now. And there are difficulties. First, we would be obliged to extend a series of public invitations. Suppose they didn't come? And suppose they did come. They would have to be here more than just a few days before we could begin to attack them."

"But you make too much difficulty about it," said Mulden. "Why must your propaganda have a basis in reality? Why not simply denounce the Jews, accuse them of plotting against the government? Simply say that they are here already, that they infiltrated quietly under the corrupt policies of your predecessors, and that now they are trying to seize the country. Despite everything you say, there must be a few Jews here. And even if there are not, they can easily be created."

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“How do you mean, created?” asked the Minister.

“Well, you know the policy of decimation, as it is used during a war. If the offensive is not going well, you pick out every tenth man in a regiment and have him shot. That inspires the other nine. You can apply the same principle in the matter of your Jewish needs. Pick out every tenth man, or—if that is too much—every twentieth man, declare him a Jew and make him the subject of your attacks. He may not like it, he may protest. But, after all, the state is supreme and every man is called upon to serve it. If he is chosen to be a Jew for the good of the state, that is his service. Refusal to serve is equivalent to mutiny in time of war, the rebel is shot. Thus you will always have a Jewish minority against which you can turn the populace in times of governmental crisis. It constitutes one of the very best dragons.”

“Create a mythical Jewish minority?” said Brunsatz. “It presents difficulties.”

“Well, you have a workable precedent,” Mul-

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

den replied. "Take the Germans, who created a mythical Nordic majority for themselves, based on a theory that if you have blonde hair and a long head, you don't need brains, the world is yours, and other people had better hand it over to you quick and get off the earth. In Germany quite a few of the dark round-heads and square-heads belonging to the Nordic majority will assure you solemnly that they are long-headed blondes, and if you suggest that they go and look in the mirror or jump in the lake they will tell you about the Treaty of Versailles. Well, if they could create a mythical Nordic majority, why can't you create a mythical Jewish minority? Just apply an intelligence test, and anybody who passes it is automatically a Jew."

The Minister was thoughtful. "I do not know," he said. "Perhaps there is something in it. But it wants method and organisation. Every twentieth man is too much. We don't want too many Jews. One per cent, perhaps, would be better."

As he went out, Mulden said, "Underneath

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

that pleasant exterior he's probably a pretty nice fellow."

"Is that a dragon, about the Jews?" I asked.

Mulden said: "I was pulling his leg."

"Will he do what you suggested?"

"No. I think he knew I was pulling his leg."

The anti-Jewish campaign was successful.

IX

Just when I was at my best, when the hunt for dragons promised new and thrilling possibilities, Emma arrived, without warning.

Many a man has been goaded into great deeds simply through the necessity for getting away from an unpleasant wife. Sheer desperation makes husbands find a cause and a mission; any mission will do which takes them far enough away. I had often wondered about the Crusades; had even gone so far as to subsidise a young man to write a true history revealing why the Crusaders were so eager to leave their homes and fight in foreign parts. The subsidy proved premature; the young man was not ready for his task. With the advance money I gave him, he got married, and forgot the Crusades. A couple of years later, however, he came back. He said he was now prepared psychologically to write the history. Would I subsidise

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

him again? He wanted to take a long, long voyage, just as long a voyage as any Crusader ever took. By that time I was more concerned with myself; I needed a voyage more than he did.

Certainly it was Emma who drove me into being a hero. But the process was curiously different from the usual one. Generally too much matrimony is to blame, too many disputes and misunderstandings. In my case there was almost no matrimony in the customary sense, and no disputes; there was nothing. But that "nothing" loomed very large.

I was practically a spectator at my own marriage; never a participant. Emma was a very active and important woman. She served on a score of committees; took a hand in politics; issued statements; organised drives for funds. I was technically her husband, one who waited silently with her coat in the ante-rooms of committee meetings. There were many who referred to me as "Mr. Emma Wilber." It was humiliating. The more active she became, the more I dwindled away. I was the ghost of a man, the most

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

pallid of shadows. At her receptions in our so-called home, no one ever spoke to me, except by mistake. Occasionally a stranger addressed me, but he soon learned better. This went on for years. At various times I plotted violent action, even thought of slaying her. I feared, however, that I could not manage it cleanly.

As may be argued by some, it should have been simple enough to step out of the picture; merely leave. In actuality, it was not so easy. For the truth was that I was fascinated by the fury and frenzy of her activity; fascinated to the extent of complete paralysis of the will. Her activity put me into a trance. It was like watching a machine belt go around and around at a factory. All I could do was stare—and hope for something to happen to the machine.

When circumstances finally did propel me out of her life, it was not difficult to become a hero; indeed, I could have become nothing else. With the Atlantic—and other factors—between us, I was at last free and energetic. It would have been impossible for me to have remained in America. Her

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

shadow would have spread over the continent. But in Europe her power over me waned. However, her influence did persist, if only in an unconscious form; it determined my future. In violent reaction to her I took up heroism. I wanted to develop my fortitude and help others develop theirs. Many heroes, no doubt, have had something wrong with them at the outset. With me it was Emma.

Now that heroism had its own integrity, it wanted nothing from Emma, and her appearance in Bidlo was an intrusion. Her "nervous collapse" had apparently given her twice the usual amount of energy, and her invasion was characteristic. She tried to apply the steam-roller to me as if I were one of the committees which she dominated.

"This is a very bad place for you, Keets," she said. "You must come back to New York with me. I have already booked passage for you for next Saturday. Please, Keets, don't be dramatic."

I was anything but dramatic. No continent, I told her calmly, was big enough to hold the two of us. She could have America.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“ I was warned to expect something like this,” she said. “ You don’t look well.”

“ Up to now I have been feeling fine,” I assured her.

The chairwoman of twenty committees, the brilliant parliamentary tactician, the militant organiser of drives, then shed a tear. “ No matter how wrongly you treated me in the past, you were never brutal,” she said. “ This is a new development, due to the sort of life you have been leading and the people it has thrown you in with. Even the Ambassador spoke of it. And dear Dayton Gribbs.”

“ Dear Dayton Gribbs ! ” I jeered. “ Is he still here ? He needs a change of scene.”

If I was brutal and insulting, it was with a purpose. For I was in fear that the slightest show of weakness would encourage her ; once more I might be precipitated into that hell of nothingness from which I had escaped. Bidlo had to be made unpleasant for her. Otherwise, the possibilities were dreadful. Suppose she decided to stay ! Suppose she decided to transplant her activities,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

create and run committees as she did in America, play the same sort of rôle here ! I might again be fascinated by the spectacle, become a helpless spectator of it.

So I was brusque that day and brusque the next. Saturday came and went and she was still there. She changed her tactics, was patient and sweet ; it made me fear her all the more. My disquietude was increased also by the knowledge that she was spending much time with my enemies ; with Gribbs, certainly an enemy, and Buncope, who nursed a grudge

There was still, however, my work. The dragon must save me from Emma. A new dragon was needed, and with Mulden I explored the field of possibilities. I worked zealously. With alarm I sensed that some of the old fire was gone. Emma ! She was becoming an obsession again.

She appeared one day at her sweetest ; inquired after my health. Casually she brought out a document. " Oh, and while I'm here," she said, " you might sign this."

" What is it ? " I asked.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“Just a routine matter,” she replied. “Something you forgot to sign when you went away.”

It was, of all things, a power of attorney. It empowered her to act for me in all matters concerning my investments. It stipulated that my financial agent could take no action of any sort without first consulting Emma and obtaining her approval.

“Of all the brazen impudence!” I cried. “Did you actually think you could get me to agree to anything like that? You’re the last person in the world I would permit to meddle in my affairs.”

“My dear Kcets,” she said, “you leave too much to Hodson. He’s taken on too many outside interests lately. After all, he’s supposed to be devoted wholly to your affairs. But at present he seems to be much more interested in the Republican Party.”

“He has always been interested in the Republican Party,” I said, hotly. “And I’ve always known about it. Hodson has no secrets from me. When he first went to work for me, he said,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

‘Whatever sacrifices I may be called upon to make, I cannot give up the Republican Party.’ And I agreed to it. I am perfectly satisfied with Hodson.”

“Hodson is forgetting himself,” she said. “He’s losing his instinct for sound investments. I’ve heard it said by more than one reliable person that Hodson has become a heavy speculator. It’s an outrage, Keets, for you to neglect your fortune like this. One fine morning you’ll wake up to find that it has evaporated. If you felt your responsibilities, you would go back to America immediately. But if you won’t go back, the least you can do is to take the vital decisions out of the hands of a stranger. You know, Keets, that I have your best interests at heart. If you’ll only sign the authorisation, I will assume the burden.”

“Hodson is not a stranger,” I said. “Hodson is my reliable and devoted slave. You will get no authorisation from me.”

Her sweetness vanished. The next five minutes were devoted to a bitter denunciation of me, of my selfishness, of my absorption in heroism. I

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

heard her out with patience. She made further attempts to wheedle my signature out of me, but in this matter I was determined never to yield.

X

IT SEEMED to have become the fashion to visit Bidlo. Never before had I seen such a bewildering variety of strangers, who appeared to have come from nowhere to take possession of the capital. Different as they were from one another, most of them had at least one thing in common. They had commissions from magazines and book publishers to write studies of "the new heroism." This struck me as a commendable activity, but I also wondered how much heroism they could really absorb in the short time they spent in Bidlo.

"Can one write a book about heroism," I asked Mulden, "after staying here no more than a week?"

"Twice too long a time," said Mulden. "For magazine articles, six hours in a country is enough. For a full-length book of twenty chapters, with personal experiences, analysis of statistics, biography of the ruler, cultural tendencies,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

mystic undercurrents, illustrative anecdotes, ancient customs and folk-lore, interviews with two peasants and one hotel doorman who knows everything, and index, the standard is three days. On the fourth day the observer breaks down, goes stale. Nothing remains for him now but to wait for his second wind, which generally takes about five years. By that time, having discarded everything that he has learned in the interim, he will once more reach the three-day stage of literary observation, and his publishing firm will be glad to hear from him, if it is still in existence."

On every train they came in—writing countesses from England, chamber of commerce statisticians from Detroit, adventurous photographers who illustrated their camera texts with words, writers who made careers of being arrested in every country, clubwomen, intrepid lecture-hall favourites, and a host of others. All of them wanted to see me as well as The Hero, but we both preferred to be inaccessible, and they were left to the solicitous ministrations of Brunsatz, who received them fulsomely.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

One arrival, however, I could not deny myself to. That was Amy.

Amy Chevron was by no means an undesirable person at all times. It was only at that particular moment in history that her presence was untimely and destructive of effort.

Because of Emma I had become heroic, but not without assistance. It was Amy who took me out of my trance; she was the propelling force. That seems extraordinary, now that I look back at it; for Amy's achievements, although heroic in one sense, were anything but heroic in another.

Amy lived for love, but generally she liked to combine it with something else, such as patriotism, machinery, politics, Arctic exploration, transatlantic flying—in short, anything which might give her love a large and sweeping significance. I think her secret regret was that she was too young for war service in 1914. Her charms might have served a national or international purpose.

I was helpless in the grip of Emma when Amy first appeared. I do not know why she put her charms to work so readily; I was not a nation, a

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

movement or a theory; I was, to my shame, "Mr. Emma Wilber." But if gratitude was ever due to a person, it was due to Amy. I had long been waiting for someone to set up a counter-spell to break the spell which Emma, with her committees, had cast over me. In rebellion against Emma, I was a willing subject to be fascinated by Amy. No subject could have been more willing. My responsiveness was really my suppressed independence reasserting its will to live through the only means offered. Amy freed me of Emma. "You are meant for big things," she said.

We went together to France. In Paris we met a man who had just donated a statue to the French people. He was very proud of it, as if it were something that no one else could do. "We'll show him," said Amy. "You will give France a bigger and better statue." So I purchased a fine French hillside and at the top I placed a statue of Marshal Foch on horseback. That was the beginning. Other statues soon dominated other French hillsides. I became so engrossed in my work, searching for available sites and planning the statues to

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

occupy them, that I neglected Amy. The first thing I knew she was spending most of her time with a young athlete who had been the model for the last statue I had presented—a memorial to the heroes of the Marne. I suppose it was the spirit of national defence which had enkindled her enthusiasm. In any case, while the marble hero stood upright in the Department of Seine-et-Marne, the model was proving to be something less than marble with Amy. We parted shortly afterwards, but I could not be angry with her. For she had rendered me a great service.

The business of finding French hillsides had provided me with a highly organised real estate department. There was also an art department and a historical research department; in all, an efficient organisation. But one day I asked myself, “Is this heroism?” I was forced to admit that it was not. It was simply marble. Statues needed the breath of life, consecration to a living ideal. I had wandered from the chosen path, but found it once more; it led to Bidlo.

But Amy also came to Bidlo.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

She came to me directly from the station. She had a commission to write a book, and her enthusiasm for the coming study of Bidlo knew no bounds. And in addition she found a new and compelling interest in me. I could be identified with something large and sweeping now; I was heroism; I was Bidlo: I was a national and international force; I was history and legend. Nothing suited her better.

"Don't bother about me," she said. "I love to find my way about myself, and make my own discoveries. You're too busy, anyway, and I shouldn't dream of imposing upon you. It will rather be fun, even if I get lost in this great big wonderful city."

At first I felt relieved that she was so unselfish and was letting me off so lightly. But it seemed important that she be given some of the authentic spiritual background of the hero system before starting out to study its physical manifestations. Without such preliminary instruction, it was possible to become confused, to view some of the detail in the wrong light, to jump to hasty and

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

wrong conclusions. It had happened to other foreign visitors. So, as we sat in my apartment, I began sketching the background of Bidlite heroism, thinking to finish with it in about half an hour. But as I proceeded I warmed to the exposition, even became eloquent. She was such a good and sympathetic audience, too, that I was inspired. I told everything, and still more of everything. All my experiences, vicissitudes, convictions, all my associations with The Hero, went into the recital. What began as a half-hour exposition stretched into a thrilling talk of many hours. And as I reached the climax of my account, Amy's eyes were alight with a new revelation, her whole being trembled with the intensity of her vision. It was dramatic. She sprang to her feet and cried, "I love heroism ! I love Bidlo ! I love The Hero ! I love it all, all, all ! I love you ! You ! You ! My hero ! My Bidlo !"

One week later I put Amy on the train. "Bidlo was wonderful !" she said.

I was the most wretched of mortals. For a week

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

I had been oblivious to mission and purpose. I had fallen from grace. And during that week, as I learned, The Hero had sent for me every day, and I had failed him. On the fifth day of my obliviousness to duty Dayton Gribbs was granted a private interview by The Hero. He was also at the palace during the following days.

I was in disgrace, and unfit to be a hero. The dragon was not to be hunted by such as I. Heroism was only for the pure. No doubt The Hero knew the details of my behaviour; his spies would have kept him informed. He had only contempt for men who let themselves be weakened by women.

Obviously I could not go near him now. Before that were possible I must again prove worthy of his confidence. I must win my way back to him through deeds.

"You had better pull yourself together," said Mulden. "You're not giving heroism the best that is in you."

When my state of depression continued, he said, "What you ought to do is go into a retreat. It would set you right again."

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“What sort of retreat?” I asked.

“How do I know? What sort of retreats are there in Bidlo?” He reflected for a moment, then a smile came to his face. “Why don’t you go to a concentration camp?”

“Would you call that a retreat?”

“Why not? Doesn’t Brunsatz say so? In his speeches he has said many times that the camps are places for the building of Bidlite character. And when you come to think of it, the concentration camp is the Abbey of Theleme of this day and age.”

“In my present state of mind, I could very well go to a concentration camp,” I said. Indeed, it struck me as being a good way to do penance.

Mulden began to evolve an idea. The concentration camps were a weak spot in the government’s campaign to prove to the world that Bidlo was the perfect state. Criticism abroad was sharp and bitter; the international press said all sorts of unpleasant things. While maintaining that their administration was perfect and left nothing to be desired, Brunsatz had long felt that something

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

ought to be done to present the camps in a better light. Tentative efforts had already been made but they lacked the finality of dramatic proof. It had merely been suggested that the camps were really training-grounds, in which rebels and backsliders were put through a régime which reclaimed them for heroism. Once they were reclaimed, they could return and take their places in heroic society. But the process had not been demonstrated sufficiently.

“The concentration camp ought to be seen as a retreat,” said Mulden. “People are not sent there as prisoners, but in order to get themselves mentally and spiritually right with heroism. It’s a cloister where they can meditate on the truth, where the best minds are sent in preparation for service to the state. Treat it that way, and the camp becomes a place to which it is a privilege to go. That eliminates all the foreign criticism.”

“There is something unfair about it,” I remarked. “If it is so desirable, why send enemies of the state there? By doing that, you place a premium upon enmity and disloyalty. As I see it,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

only the best heroes, the men who have proved most militant in the support of The Hero, deserve to be sent to the camp."

"How about a happy compromise?" said Mulden. "You send enemies there to be reformed, but you also send a few of the choicest persons for the retreat part of it. First of all, they would serve as models for the others. Secondly, the very fact that they were going there, announced through Brunsatz's wonderful machine, would be an answer to all the foreign criticism. But there is still one little difficulty. Where to get the volunteers?"

"I have already said that I am ready to go to a camp," I answered.

I was indeed ready. Penance, redemption, regeneration, revitalisation of heroism, were an immediate necessity for my spirit. Although this was the main consideration, there were other factors impelling my decision. Buncope had suggested to The Hero that my prominence in Bidlo was proving an embarrassment to official diplomatic relations. By many I was regarded as the

· CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

unofficial American Ambassador, although I was nothing of the sort. He suggested that it would be helpful if I were to "decide to leave Bidlo." In this suggestion, he was of course supported by Emma and by Dayton Gribbs. But the last thing I wanted was to leave Bidlo. Heroism could still obtain valuable service from me, once I was regenerated.

"I shall talk to Brunsatz about this," said Mulden.

"Is there a dragon in it?" I asked.

"Perhaps not a dragon, but anyway a good idea," he replied.

Brunsatz was enthusiastic. It was just the plan he had been waiting for, and he appreciated my willingness, as Volunteer Number One, to furnish incontestable proof of the real quality of the camps. He would ask for a few more volunteers too.

The wonderful propaganda system went to work. Through press, radio, mass meeting, word went forth of the true nature of the camps. They suffered from a misunderstanding not only abroad

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

but even in Bidlo. It was an error to assume they were intended for punishment. In reality they were places for the building and rebuilding of Bidlite character. Not only that, but they were retreats to which the best Bidlites could be invited when they were exhausted from their labours for the state; there they would again find direction, be refreshed and replenished. The camps, therefore, were not only for those who were to be brought to the right path, but also for those who were the very pioneers of the new heroism.

The call for volunteers followed. So effective was the call that the results took even the government by surprise. I was Volunteer Number One, of course, but in addition to me there were applications the first day from one million others.

"Propaganda is a wonderful thing," said Mulden.

The authorities were overwhelmed. Did everybody in Bidlo want to get into a concentration camp? It looked very much that way. It seemed as if they preferred it to the freedom of the Hero régime. Even Brunsatz was a bit shaken.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“ My propaganda is too good,” he said, meditatively.

“ It would be better if it did not function so well,” Mulden commented. “ After all, there’s a disadvantage in stampeding everybody every time you have a notion. When they’re so pliable, it means they can also be stampeded the other way. What you really want is about a ten per cent response to your machine. That’s enough to make a showing and to let you do what you want. It’s all right to have a population that you can whip into a frenzy, but in addition you also want a solid citizenry that won’t budge for anything. They won’t move for you and they won’t move against you. They just go along, mind their own business, eat, sleep, make love, turn the radio off when there’s no music, and pay no attention to politics.”

Brunsatz looked at Mulden with horror. “ Such people are traitors and should be shot,” he declared. “ Turn the radio off when one of us is speaking ? It is treason ! People whose radios are not operating when we are talking are reported

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

to the secret police. True soldiers of the state observe this rule."

It was announced that the response was gratifying and showed the true heroic spirit. For the present the camps could not accommodate all who had volunteered. Applications would be considered one at a time, in order of receipt; a large clerical staff was classifying them. For the present the distinguished American, Mr. Keets Wilber, would serve as an answer to the lying foreign press. In a statement I declared that I was taking the step only after careful consideration and in full consciousness of what I was doing. I was heartily in favour of the retreat, and hoped others would follow my example.

Emma was incensed, of course, but I ignored her. Once more she flourished that insolent document for which she wanted my signature, and again I refused. The day before I was to enter the camp, Mulden gave out another statement in my behalf. It was to the effect that I did not expect nor want lenient treatment. It was just as necessary to be harsh with me at the outset as with

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

enemies of the state. For the hero must be trained in a hard school. At the beginning I might even have to be beaten, as the others were; this was to put iron into me, the necessary iron of the hero. Only then, when all the softness and corruption had been driven out of me, as well as the deleterious remainders of individualism, could I begin to have the quality required of a hero. Thus, for enemy or for friend, the treatment was the same; it all depended upon the point of view.

Nothing had been neglected. In the field outside the camp, twenty thousand heroes in ranks awaited me, as well as camera and news-reel men. Brunsatz spoke, and I replied. A band played martial music; the crowd cheered and saluted. I walked up to the gate between two men carrying banners, and at the entrance the director greeted me. I went inside, and the gates closed behind me.

XI

AT FIRST the camp officials were loath to treat me as harshly as they did the others. They soon learned what I thought of such slackness.

Every day for a week I was put through a rigorous routine. The day began with a flogging, followed by a double-quick up and down the yard. After breakfast there was another whipping, then lessons. First, a repetition of the hero's catechism. This was to be committed to memory, and a call for its recital was a possibility at any hour of the day or night. Followed an hour's exposition of the superiorities of Bidlo, and then an hour's denunciation of all other countries and non-heroes. These also were to be memorised; the board of examiners liked to ask for them at unexpected moments. In the afternoon there were drills, talks by professors on the ideology of the hero movement, and the group singing of hero songs. For

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

an hour before supper there was spying. This was an important feature of the day. Each of us was expected to spy upon the other; special rewards awaited those who did it well. Supper was succeeded by a light flogging. Sometimes the routine varied, but not very much.

The lectures were a feature of the day which were appreciated by all. Professor Krimsatz was our favourite lecturer. History was his subject and he made it fascinating. The first lecture I heard him deliver was a revelation.

"We will begin with the universe," he said. "The world was created by Godsatz. It was created exclusively for Bidlo, but other nations stole it. We will get it back. Gunpowder was invented by Bunsatz. Electricity was the discovery of Kinsatz. America was discovered by Munsatz. The first printer was Fulsatz. Wireless was the invention of Jifsatz. The first man to fly the Atlantic was Belsatz. Shakespeare was the pseudonym of a Bidlite named Drinsatz. The globe was first circumnavigated by Lumsatz. Photography was due to the work of Milsatz, and to Hornsatz we

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

owe the motion picture. But of course the greatest of these were Orsatz and Winsatz."

No detail of the history of human development through the ages had escaped him. Whether a continent or the fireless cooker, he knew to whom credit was due for its existence. He was always good for a full hour of information. Sometimes, when he had finished, he asked if there were questions. Once I responded.

"Do you think the West is declining?" I asked.

"Forsatz," he replied.

"Will man ever master the machine?"

"Lupsatz."

"Will we ever communicate with Mars?"

"Timsatz."

Mulden used to call at the camp, but I declined to see him. I desired no communication with the outer world. The spirit of the cloister had entered my soul. One duty, and one only—regeneration—existed for me.

At the end of the first week I felt that some progress had been achieved. There still were

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

many faults to be corrected; patience was required; in good time they would disappear. I passed an examination in the hero's catechism and the denunciation of other countries, and so was ready for more advanced group training.

The most fascinating example of disciplinary education at the camp was the spelling regiment. This unit was trained to perform evolutions which spelled the names of Winsatz, Orsatz, Bidlo. The men operated as one organism, and they could shift with amazing speed from one letter to another, or one word to another. It was inspiring to watch them at work, wheeling, counter-marching, manœuvring, leaping or flowing into a new formation, ever changing the combination and subject of their spelling. When I reflected that such magnificent results were obtained from former enemies of the government, I realised more than ever the value of the hero training. Such results, of course, had not been obtained overnight. Before they could be integrated into this regiment, the men must have passed through their preliminary and secondary beatings and catechisms;

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

all traces of individualism must have been driven out. It was planned to exhibit them later in public, as a supreme example of the reformatory work of the state. In every sense could the regiment be called a tribute to reclamation. Reclaimed material it surely was; reclaimed from the flabby days of liberalism and transformed into the best of object lessons. True, the men at first had shown a distaste for spelling, some had even rebelled, but their petulance could not prevail against the wisdom of the state.

In some inexplicable way I was drawn to these men. Even though none of them chose to talk or displayed any curiosity about me, I felt friendly towards them and they must have sensed it. Their distaste for conversation, their lack of curiosity, was not merely an attitude reserved for me; it was general and permanent. I saw them put to the test. Officials tempted them with questions, to see if anything held over from their previous unredeemed state. Interrogated about the past, they replied that they did not remember their earlier life; they recalled nothing at all. As a final proof,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

it was the policy to apply one of the old intelligence tests so much favoured by the previous régime for the sifting out of morons. Under the hero system such a test had no value and was undesirable, but it was still serviceable for the detection of heresy. If a man could pass it, he was still unreclaimed; more beatings and catechisms were necessary. When they first came to the camp all the members of the spelling regiment had passed the test; now they failed every time. Even their names were vague to them. If you asked a man who he was, he might reply finally, after some coaxing, "I am Number Three of the top of the letter Z." But they were contented with their new life. All they seemed to want to do was to spell Winsatz, recite the catechisms and denunciations, march up and down, and eat.

I wanted to join the regiment, but there were difficulties. However, I was permitted to drill with it as a guest speller. I was shifted from letter to letter. Once I was part of the outside formation of the letter N, at other times I was devoted to W. My co-spellers were helpful. Until I could make

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

all the shifts by myself, one of them always took my arm and pulled me in the required direction. Soon, however, I was able to find my way about by myself from one formation to another. I lived in a glow of achievement and of service, and it seemed to me inevitable that the last vestiges of individualism should be eliminated from my blood, my nerves, my skin. When that should be achieved, I could be as one with my co-spellers.

What was my horror, however, to find that I had not progressed as much as I had expected. I tried various tests upon myself. To my astonishment and chagrin I could still remember facts from the past, could still reason (and how that hurt me !), was still able to answer questions and to argue. My overseers had to beat me a little more frequently and roughly, but there was no appreciable change. Could I not be reclaimed? Was there some inner devil in me which resisted, which mocked all my efforts? Was I doomed to have an individual soul and a liberal psychology? I wished I could stamp it out. A sense of guilt possessed me, a feeling that part of me was a

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

traitor, and even gloated in being a traitor. If it had only been tangible, so that I could have put my hands upon it, I should have made short work of it.

Gradually I was forced to the realisation that I should probably never become a hero in the absolute sense. My spirit was too rebellious, and the contradictions stood out.

Nevertheless, I was not necessarily lost to the cause. History, as Mulden pointed out, was full of examples of contradictions and incongruities in the personalities of the famous.

Whether I was one hundred per cent a hero or not, I could spell. The regiment was destined to give a magnificent exhibition of its training and I wanted to take a part in it. In the brain of Brunsatz a brilliant notion had been born. No finer demonstration of Bidlite achievement could be imagined than the showing of these former enemies spelling in unison the name of the glorious leader. It would bring a glow to all heroes and serve as another answer to the lying foreign press. Brunsatz had arranged, therefore,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

that the spelling regiment serve as the occasion for a great festival. The regiment was to be brought to the huge athletic stadium on the outskirts of the capital. There, in the presence of The Hero, the Cabinet, the sub-leaders, and a hundred thousand heroes, the spellers would make their tribute to the new heroism.

With all the persuasiveness and feeling at my command, I pleaded for inclusion in the regiment's demonstration. I pointed out that I was letter-perfect. I argued my devotion to The Hero. At first the camp officials were unwilling to assent to it. Luck was in my favour, however. At the last moment several of the spellers relapsed into intelligence and were thus unfit for duty. Replacements were required. I was accepted.

XII

WE—THE spelling regiment—were brought to the capital in the early morning on a special train. In the afternoon our great performance was to be given. The regiment was headed for a barracks, where it would be held until just before the time to go to the stadium. Inasmuch as I was a guest speller and had the option of free movement, I arranged to spend the morning in the city with Mulden and others, and in the afternoon would rejoin the regiment at the barracks prior to leaving for the stadium. Now that my period of regeneration was over, I wanted to hear all the news; all that had happened in the interim with regard to The Hero, the dragon, and my enemies.

I parted from my comrades at the station. Several of them gave me letters to mail to their families, and I dropped them in a box outside the

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

station. I was a little surprised to learn that they were still able to write, thinking that such knowledge had been completely driven from their heads, except for the ability to spell Winsatz, Orsatz, Bidlo.

After a few minutes in the city streets, I sensed a change in the atmosphere. Physically the town looked the same; the same hurried movement, the same abundance of uniforms. But the air seemed charged with a new element. I learned it first from the speech of passers-by.

In the street two pedestrians stopped and greeted each other. "Good-morning. Raw materials," said one.

"How are you? Raw materials," the other replied.

An odd form of salutation, I thought.

Not yet having breakfasted, I entered a café. A waiter appeared to take my order. As I scanned the menu, he said, "We have no raw materials."

I looked at his eyes in suspicion. But he seemed normal. "Who said anything about raw materials?" I asked. "I did not enter this café with

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

the idea of consuming a ton of copper or a bale of cotton. My preference is for bacon and eggs."

"We can give you bacon and eggs," he replied.

"But we have no raw materials."

"Why not?" I asked, determined to pursue the matter.

"The raw materials which Bidlo should have," he said, "are in territories controlled by Linkau. They are ours by right, and we shall get them."

"Have you always talked like that?" I asked.

"I am a patriot," he answered. "What my country requires of me, I will say."

"What are raw materials?" I asked, still desirous of exploring his mind. The question angered him in some way, and he looked as if he intended to report me to the secret police. He went off quickly to attend to another customer, and when he brought me my bacon and eggs he put them on the table silently and contemptuously and left. The radio in the establishment was in operation, and as I attacked breakfast I heard an announcement. "The subject of this morning," said the

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

announcer, "is raw materials. You will hear from five renowned speakers on this subject which is so important to Bidlo."

I left the café. In the street a sweeper and a porter were talking of raw materials.

Raw materials raw materials raw materials
RAW MATERIALS!!!!

What was this?

Then I spied a little boy leaning against a shop window at the corner. There, I thought, would be an infallible guide to the country's problems. Brunsatz, through his wonderful machine, always took great pains to keep the little boys and little girls informed up to the minute as to Bidlo's needs. If you wanted to know what the government was thinking about, you asked a little boy what he wanted most. I decided to ask this one. I approached him and said, "What do you want my young hero?"

He replied: "I want coal, oil, iron, copper, cotton, nickel, tungsten, rubber, potash, nitrates. I want raw materials."

"How will you get them, my junior hero?"

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

"Linkau stole them from us, but we will get them back," he said. "We are a growing and vigorous people. We must have room to expand. We will fight."

"Does your mother approve of this?"

"My mother is a woman," he said. "She belongs in the kitchen."

"Does your father approve of this?"

"My father is a traitor," he said. "I reported him to the secret police."

"Any brothers or sisters?" I asked.

"I have a sister who is fifteen years old," he said. "It's about time she became a mother. Bidlo needs soldiers. They wanted to send her to a camp where she could become a mother, but she wouldn't go. She's a traitor, too."

"Poor little orphan," I said sympathetically, patting his head. "Only the government loves you."

I left Brunsatz's charming boy and hurried to see Mulden. He was already at the office. He greeted me and started giving me the news of what had happened while I was at the camp.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“Before you tell me anything,” I said, “explain one thing to me. What about raw materials?”

“Oh, you’ve got on to that already,” he said. “That’s the new dragon.”

“How?”

“The dragon is outside of Bidlo now. He’s in Linkau, where he greedily hoards raw materials which Bidlo needs and shall have.”

“Did you give the government that dragon?”

“Oh, no,” he said. “There’s a new dragon-finder on the job. Your friend the industrialist, Kelsatz.”

“Kelsatz! But I thought he had been liquidated. The campaign against business, you remember.”

“Yes, I remember.” He smiled. “The government attacked big business into a ten per cent increase in dividends and smashed the trade unions. Any time you hear of a government or a group or a leader attacking big business and radicals at the same time, the meaning is clear. It means that labouring people are going to become very, very thin, but big business will become very, very fat.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

Just good old-fashioned orthodox Fascism."

"I have heard of Fascism, of course," I said.

"But I always thought it was a kind of heroism."

"It's that kind of heroism," he said. "Winsatz and Kelsatz wielding the sword of Orsatz against a dragon which is a red herring."

"I ought to see The Hero," I said.

"Maybe you will," said Mulden. "At a celebration of the Hero Party, from a distance of two hundred yards, and with ten thousand guards to keep you from getting any closer."

"About those raw materials," I said. "Has Bidlo always lacked them?"

"For about a thousand years more or less—as long as there has been a Bidlo. But nobody lost much sleep about it until Paul Revere Brunsatz spread the alarm. Now the lover woos his lass with a song of copper deposits, and the world is well lost for a tankful of petroleum. Mamma and Papa quarrel over the statistics of cotton production, the baby is lullabied to sleep with a song of 'nitrates, sweet nitrates, in the stars for you,' and when you sit down to luncheon you bring along

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

a ton of nickel for company. They always said that Oscar Wilde was a brilliant conversationalist. He could have done a lot with tungsten and zinc at a dinner table here."

"Why the sudden necessity for raw materials?" I asked.

"Bidlo and Linkau are getting ready to fight a war," he said. "Wars for territory used to be fought for national honour, but nowadays, when you let everybody in on your fun, you need a good modern slogan, like raw materials. And underneath the surface some wonderful things are going on. Bidlo is lending money to Linkau so that Linkau can prepare to fight Bidlo. Linkau is lending money to Bidlo so that Bidlo can prepare to fight Linkau."

"Does Brunsatz know of this?" I asked.

"How would he know? Who would tell him?"

"Someone ought to tell him," I said. "It might be a good dragon for his wonderful machine."

"Suppose you try and suggest it."

"I do not understand finance," I said.

He gave me the news. Emma had left for

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

America. Winsatz was again receiving tourists who praised the train service. Dayton Gribbs was still in Bidlo and was received frequently at the palace. He was writing a book about Winsatz, and had already been awarded the new decoration of the Order of Orsatz.

At the barracks my comrades were impatiently awaiting the order to depart for the stadium. An amazing change seemed to have come over them. They talked volubly among themselves. They were animated. Some of them even laughed. Apparently the holiday was doing them good.

The man who had always described himself as "third from the left on the top of the letter Z" smiled upon me in friendly fashion. "My name is Barsatz," he said. "And let me introduce Krunsatz, Halsatz, Lansatz, and——" He introduced most of them, and I was delighted. They had found their voices, and showed an interest in life and in heroism.

We were transported in motor-trucks to the stadium. In a large hall underneath the stands

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

officials looked us over, inspecting us closely for neatness of uniforms and lack of facial expression. They pronounced themselves satisfied, and we marched on the field.

The stands were filled with a cheering, roaring crowd, full of heroic holiday spirit. With a brass band in front of us, we made a complete tour of the field, stopping finally in front of The Hero's box, where we tendered him the required salute, to which he responded with pleasure. Then we took our places in the centre of the field, standing at ease while we waited for the orders which would transform us into a perfect living organism of spelling.

Barsatz stood next to me. "Look at all the swine," he said. "They have brought us here like slaves, to make a Roman holiday in the arena, and spell the stupid name of Winsatz."

I looked at him with wonder, astonished to discover that in spite of his camp training he was still lucid.

"Yes, like slaves," he said. "They have taken away our liberty, our freedom of opinion, our

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

parliament, our rights to be men. They have punished our families. They have put the people of Bidlo in a strait-jacket. But we have a parliament of our own."

Not only was he speaking with a coherence which I thought had long since been clubbed out of him, but he looked every inch a hero—proud, militant, defiant. Apparently I was not the only one who could not meet the hero standards of the concentration camp. The others, too, as I looked at them, seemed to have been suddenly transformed. They had the appearance of being intelligent and proud.

"But I thought all the intelligence had been clubbed out of you," I said to Barsatz.

"So our gaolers thought too," he replied. "But in spite of everything, whips, kicks, clubs, we saved a little part of our intelligence—for an emergency. Enough to do a little secret training of our own."

The order came to begin spelling. Quickly we snapped into action and lettered ourselves into position. First we spelled Bidlo. The crowd voiced

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

its satisfaction. Orsatz came next, and we leaped into the evolutions required for the first dragon-slayer's name. The performance was greeted with redoubled enthusiasm. But when we spelled the name of Winsatz the applause was deafening.

Barsatz grabbed my arm. "Follow me in everything I do," he said. "You don't know these new formations, so just keep along with me."

"What is it?" I asked.

"We are going to spell something of our own, as a little surprise," he said. "The true parliament of Bidlo will speak at last, without censorship."

He yelled an order, to which all the men responded with a yell. The evolutions started at lightning speed. I was pulled this way and that way; it was thrilling.

"What are we spelling?" I asked, as I ran along with Barsatz.

"Down with Winsatz," he replied.

In a moment all my ideas had changed. They had, in fact, been ready for a change for some time, but I had doggedly refused to recognise it.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

With Kelsatz in power, with Winsatz a puppet and heroism a mask for business profits, I had reached the period of revulsion and disgust. I felt that my ideals had been betrayed. With a war for "raw materials" being plotted, I was ready for indignation. But it took that dramatic moment in the stadium to crystallise my new sentiments. The thought of several hundred men defying the power of the state and a crowd of one hundred thousand gave me a new sensation. It was as good as the Charge of the Light Brigade. It was Thermopylæ. It was the Alamo. It was Pickett's Charge and Custer's Last Stand. These were the real heroes and I was glad to be among them, and would spell anything they would spell. They had withstood all the beatings and catechisms of the régime. They had not succumbed, and retained their intelligence and fortitude; they still were men. I was proud to be of their number.

We finished "Down with Winsatz" and the crowd in the stands was in a daze, not realising fully as yet the enormity of what had happened. "Quickly!" Barsatz cried. "We must do

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

Brunsatz before they start shooting. We haven't much time."

I swung into Brunsatz's name with joy. Here at last was an answer to his wonderful machine; an answer he would never forget. "We are spelling 'Brunsatz is a louse' in capital letters," Barsatz panted as we ran and leaped together through the formation.

By the time we finished that tribute to the Propaganda Minister, the stands were in an uproar. There were shrieks, boos, hisses, cheers, pistol-shots, and general confusion. I even noted, as we leaped into still another formation, that there was much fighting in the stands. Apparently we had friends there as well as foes.

Then the crowd swept on the field, and soon they were upon us, and we were in a *mêlée* of flying fists, clubs, and—strange to note—a good many extra overcoats and hats. I let drive with my right fist at one man who came at me, but he held me off, cried, "I'm a friend, you fool," threw a hero coat around me and jammed a hero hat on my head. "Come, we must get out of

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

here," he said. Others had the same idea. I noticed a few of my comrades in the throng as we shoved about, and they too had hero coats and hats. In unison, helped by thousands from the stands, we milled, shoved, emitted shouts of battle, and inexorably we pushed our way in a mass to the exit, where we swept the surprised guards aside and made good our escape.

XIII

I HAD come to Bidlo in quest of the comradeship of heroes. And at last, after many vicissitudes and mistakes, I had found them. For in Bidlo, as I now realised, there were two kinds of heroes. One kind was a hero by enrolment and decree, who wore a uniform and terrorised everybody into submission. The other hero was the person who had to suffer and endure the official hero. His was a more difficult heroism, and so I decided to make his cause mine.

About half of my spelling comrades were recaptured in the stadium and were shot for treason. Although all Bidlo must have heard of the stadium rebellion by word of mouth, there was not the slightest reference to it in press or radio. Instead, a furious attack was launched against all the dragons at once—Linkau, raw materials, big business, the Jews, the Communists, the Catholics,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

the Protestants, the freethinkers, the Eskimos, French millinery, Italian lemons, and the heavy rainfall which had interfered with a parade.

With Barsatz and others I was in hiding for two days. There was really no necessity for it from the standpoint of personal security, for I was not under suspicion and could have gone immediately from the stadium to my apartment or office. (In fact, the authorities thought I was still at the camp.) But I preferred to share the dangers of my comrades and make plans for their aid. When I emerged, after many long discussions, I was an enemy of the government.

Winsatz was no hero. Gone was my early feeling that he might be a modern version of Jason, Hercules, Beowulf, Orsatz, St. George. He was rather, as Mulden called him, "a sauerkraut Capone with a shirt, an ideology, and a goose-step; the chief eunuch of the harem of big business; a tin-pot Siegfried created by an industrialist Wotan." While the streams of hero propaganda covered the land, the hero-thugs were clubbing men and women into submission, encouraging

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

cruelty in children, elevating treachery to the highest of moral standards.

Strangely, I found myself thinking of America I had always taken America for granted and had sought my heroes elsewhere. Did I resemble Dayton Gribbs a little? It was an uncomfortable thought. For it came back to me that we had had heroes in America too, but of a different kind. They were heroes for freedom, against intolerance and tyranny. As I looked at Bidlo, the country I had practically adopted, I began to have an intense admiration for America, the country I had almost forgotten.

Quite apart from all such considerations, it was much more interesting to be against Bidlite heroism than to be for it, and I wondered why it had not occurred to me long before. Any one could be the supporter of a powerful dictatorship; most people, in fact, rushed to its support as soon as it became powerful. But to be against it, to refuse to climb on the band-wagon, to pit your slender strength and craft against its preponderating force, was more of a distinction, even

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

though it was a secret distinction, appreciated only by yourself and a few others. I became secretive and a conspirator, met Barsatz and his friends at various obscure places of rendezvous, contributed funds for "underground" work, for printing and for organisation. Mulden knew of it, of course; I had informed him immediately.

"You'll have to cultivate a public smile of approval for the government," he said. "There's nothing like being a hypocrite in a good cause."

There was, indeed, some pleasure in hypocrisy, and I regretted not having tried it sooner; it was a discovery and I wondered how long it had been going on. But I had missed out on so many things in life, and seemed to stumble upon them only by accident. I smiled sweetly upon Brunsatz when he recalled to me that there had never been an official ending to my stay at the camp. Gladly I agreed to return to the camp gates and have myself photographed in the act of departing as a fully regenerated hero. Regenerated I was, no doubt of it; but not as Brunsatz thought.

Even when I was honoured by a surprise visit

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

from the great Kelsatz himself, I greeted him with all affability, much in contrast with my previous reception of him. The distinguished dragon-finder had the air of one more than pleased with his fortunes. There had been another violent government attack against business that day, and it seemed to have agreed with him uncommonly well.

This time he had not sought me out because of my intimacy with Winsatz. It was a purely business visit. He knew I had large sums of money to invest, and he wanted to let me in on a good thing. My true sentiment was for booting him into the street, but the new self-discipline called for hypocrisy. I managed my emotions so well that in my face he could read only a boyish eagerness for profit. The enterprise he wished to interest me in was a loan to Linkau, and he would be most happy if I took a large share of it. The syndicate floating the loan had the full blessings of the Winsatz Government, for the results would benefit heroism greatly.

“What sort of loan is it?” I asked.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

He began describing it with gusto. Probably with eloquence too, although, his eloquence being financial, I was not a fit judge of it. His speech was full of technical terms which were more in Hodson's department than in mine. So far as I was concerned, when he talked finance at me he talked a foreign language, and I called in Mulden to serve as the interpreter between us. "Tell it to him," I said. "He understands finance. I don't." I went into one of the other rooms and settled into a corner with a book.

Mulden reported later. "It's a simple proposition," he said. "Linkau has raw materials. Bidlo has finished products. So the two nations do business. Bidlo establishes a credit loan of two hundred millions for Linkau, which uses it to buy finished products from Bidlo. Linkau pays back in raw materials."

"I can follow it so far," I said. "What happens next?"

"With the raw materials Bidlo makes finished products. She sells the finished products to Linkau, which pays for them in raw materials."

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“ And then ? ”

“ Having received the pay for these finished products in raw materials, Bidlo converts the raw materials into finished products and she sells them to Linkau, which pays for them in raw materials. Shall I continue or skip ? ”

“ When does it end ? ”

“ When they both have enough to shoot away at each other.”

“ Then these finished products are——”

“ Must I tell you ? Munitions of war.”

“ There is something wrong about it,” I said.

“ How ? ”

“ If they’re enemies, why should they deal with each other ? It seems to me they would do that kind of business through an intermediary, through a third nation.”

“ And cut down the commissions by dividing with a third party ? Very unsound finance, as your man Hodson would tell you. After all, it’s Linkau’s and Bidlo’s war ; why bring in a rank outsider to share the profits ? Over in Linkau there’s a Linkite Kelsatz, heading another government-

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

blessed syndicate. They've gone to a lot of trouble to get this thing started ; there's a profit both ways. Cutting in a third party on the profits is an immoral practice, almost as immoral as workmen's insurance or a tax on industry. It's unethical."

" I do not understand finance," I said.

Outside, in the street, the daily parade of shouting and singing heroes was in procession. " Raw materials," I said. " All those men out there are probably talking and thinking raw materials, by order of Brunsatz. Soon they'll be fighting for them. But will any of those men get any part of the raw materials ? "

" In finished products," said Mulden.

Perhaps I was impatient. But I craved action, and immediately. An uprising was what I wanted to see. But my comrades said it was impossible. Organisation was difficult. A man could trust very few people he knew, there were so many spies and informers. You gave some apparently sympathetic person a hint of your real sentiments, and then a band of heroes came for you in the

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

night. Terrorism was rampant. Although the oppressed ones constituted the majority of the population, they represented so many different viewpoints and backgrounds that a unified resistance was well-nigh impossible. A few valiant souls, such as Barsatz, were ready for anything, but in the main the spirit was one of hopelessness. People sought to comfort themselves with the belief that the madness of heroism would burn itself out, and the country be restored to its senses. Many who nursed this belief even went into the hero movement, seeking the protection of a uniform for their persons or interests. At enthusiastic rallies of the Hero Party their applause was the loudest. You could not tell who was a hero and who was not, but the effects and results were the same.

“ But this cannot go on,” I said. “ If something is not done, that war will start and then it will be too late. Patriotism will sweep most of you into line behind your oppressor Winsatz, defender of the fatherland against a foreign foe.”

“ We are helpless now,” said Halsatz. “ It is

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

bitter to think that only through military defeat, the slaughter of our brothers and sons, can Bidlo be liberated from tyranny."

"And then what?"

"Another crafty madman will start another hero movement," he said, bitterly. "He will obtain followers and financial support. And the next time there will be no need to hark back to the ancient Orsatz for a national rallying cry. They will simply call for a return to the golden age of the national hero Winsatz. Our historians will see to that. Our poets will glorify him. He will be represented as the flaming foe of the very interests he serves so well. He will be deified.

"The new Hero will be just as ruthless as the present one. To stop him at all before he seizes power, we will have to be twice as ruthless ourselves. We will have to become tyrants and oppressors too. The vicious cycle of tyranny has started. We are being made into heroes by Winsatz. I, and millions like myself, were easy-going and tolerant, content to lead our own lives and let others lead theirs. When a madman came

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

out of our mythological forest waving his mythological sword, we thought him comical; we laughed good-humouredly. But a sense of humour is too expensive a luxury in Bidlo. Certainly it is overrated as a defence against a madman, for the madman is unable to see the joke. Nor can we see the joke now. We cannot have a sense of humour in this country, nor can we dare in the future to be gentle and tolerant. The hero movement has been a vast compulsory school for the education of the people in tyranny. Whether we wish to or not, we are absorbing its lessons.

“ Whatever happens, one way or the other, a pleasant prospect lies ahead for Bidlo. If Winsatz should win his war, our national ego will overcome our repugnance to tyranny. It will be very difficult for us to resist puffing ourselves out with pride and being contemptuous and arrogant towards the rest of the world. We have that in our character and history too. The most tolerant among us may fall into that attitude; we may become just as insufferable as the heroes who oppress us to-day. If Winsatz loses, another

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

Winsatz will come along to save us in the manner of the present one. Or we forestall him by becoming tyrannical ourselves."

These opponents of Winsatz were so various in their attitudes that it appeared impossible to unify them into a fighting instrument. There was Dorsatz, for instance, who said: "I hate Winsatz, of course, but I cannot help being fascinated by his career as a hero. Despite all he has done to me, to my family and friends, to my physical and spiritual liberty, the fascination persists. He began as a hero because he had the heroic urge; he was that kind of unbalanced visionary. He had no idea of being the puppet of anyone, least of all of business men and industrialists. But it was inevitable that he should become their puppet; without them his heroism could not function. Military glory is his aim, and it is a programme which fits in with the desires of his masters for new territories to be exploited for profit. But Winsatz, seeing himself as a maker of Bidlite history, is also an unconscious agent of world history, which follows its own path and uses men

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

instead of being used by them. Winsatz will fight to the last Bidlite and make him like it, even when he makes him fight against his own best interests. By his dynamic urge for military action, he will break up the existing pattern of society. He will destroy not only himself, but the very industrialists and their system which made him possible. That will be the result of his heroism, a far different result from that which he seeks. Meanwhile, it is very difficult for all of us, living in this present cadre of history, and, to us Winsatz is a legalised bandit and cut-throat, the glorified adventurer of our times "

I was impatient with all their different attitudes. These Europeans were depressing in their fatalistic acceptance of tyrants "Americans never would take anything like this lying down," I said. "The spirit of the farmers of Lexington is too strong."

"Why don't you go back to America and see?" said Mulden "Quite a few moguls of American big business are very anxious to have a Winsatz in America. They even feel that they can put him

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

over if they can get the help of the farmers of Lexington. Some of the descendants of those farmers, by the way, are not a bit averse to having an American Winsatz, especially the women folks. They would love to have a tyrant they could gush and gurgle about, and it's a shorter trip to Washington than to Europe for a pilgrimage to a dictator."

"Then I will go back to America and fight," I said. "It will be a pleasure and a mission Business ! Profits ! I thank God I am not a predatory capitalist How I despise the greedy ogre, with his big fat belly, his high hat, and his cigar "

"You've been seeing cartoons," said Mulden. "As a matter of fact, the predatory capitalist isn't like that at all "

"No ? Well, what is he like ? "

"Some of them are very charming gentlemen whom it is a pleasure to meet, and who know and care nothing about business. In fact, they resemble you."

"Me ? But I am not a business man."

"It's amazing how many of you there are who

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

are not business men," he said. " You travel, play at collecting stained glass, water colours, old masters, antiques, or dictators, and because you don't actually sit in an office and worry about your money, you insist you are not business men. But in reality you're the most efficient kind of business man, the absentee overlord. Your money works for you without any complications of sentiment or strife, and you're responsible to nobody. You don't know your employees, and they don't know you. You don't even know what you own, since all it represents to you is a pile of engraved paper which pays dividends. It might represent a rubber jungle in Sumatra, a coal mine in Pennsylvania, a steel mill in Birmingham, oil wells in Persia, woollen mills in Massachusetts, film companies in Hollywood. As a large stockholder in film companies, you probably own the majority rights to Greta Garbo, and neither one of you any the wiser. Then, while you are sitting over dinner in Paris or London and discussing whether you ought to get an El Greco or an old coach, those stock certificates get shifted around in Wall Street,

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

and between the soup and the roast you will have swapped ownerships."

"Between the soup and the roast?" I said.

"All right, between the dessert and the coffee, if you prefer it that way. Anyway, the ownerships are swapped, and instead of jungles in Brazil you own pineapples in Hawaii. Greto Garbo in Hollywood is traded in for an automobile factory in Detroit, or a Texas oil field. Of course, you don't know about it, so you're not a business man."

"It may be as you say, but I did not invent that system."

"No, and it's a very nice and clean system, and your conscience is clear. If there is any dirty work to be done, such as bribing legislators, backing dictators, importing gunmen for strike-breaking, or starting Latin-American revolutions, others will do it. If your overseers don't make good to you in dividends, they go out. Well, they make good."

"Since you are so exercised about it," I said, "suppose you tell me what I ought to do."

"I don't know," said Mulden. "Unless you

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

want to transfer some of those stock certificates to me. All I want to do is disprove your claim that you are not a business man. Quite the contrary, you are *the* business man, the keystone to the system. Those fellows you scorn, the ones sitting at their desks and worrying, are working and worrying for you."

"I don't think I shall look into the matter," I said.

"Better not. It's bad business."

XIV

"SOMETHING must be wrong with me," I said, "I have a very peculiar feeling."

Mulden came over and looked at me. "You look a bit tired," he said. "It must be the strain of being a hypocrite for the revolution that's wearing you down."

"It is not the hypocrisy," I said. "I can stand that very well. I've been a hypocrite for two weeks now and have not experienced the slightest fatigue. In fact, I've been getting up earlier and earlier each morning, so that I could crowd more hypocrisy into the day. No, it is something else."

"A pain, or a fever?"

"I don't know exactly how to describe it. Perhaps it is only a hallucination. Perhaps it will pass in a moment."

"Shall we wait?"

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

"It is still with me," I announced. "I wonder what you will think of it, Mulden. For some time I have had a curious, troubling thought in the back of my head, and it has not left me. I have the feeling that I have seen this government somewhere before, but I cannot place it."

"In another country?"

"That is the trouble, I cannot recall. You have often, no doubt, seen a face which seems familiar to you, and yet you cannot remember where you have remarked it before, or with which part of your life the person may have been associated. You try to recall and cannot; it irritates you, leaves you no peace. That has been my recent feeling about this government. I grew certain that it was not something new, that I had seen it before I ever came to Bidlo."

"In the Roman Empire? When you were a Christian slave?"

"No, Mulden, it's not that sort of thing."

"In the realms of the poetic imagination? In the opera-house?"

"I wish I could remember."

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

“Just what sort of memory pictures have you got? Even if they're vague, they might provide a clue.”

“I see many people striking each other with clubs. I see others being kicked. And yet, despite this violence, they all seem to have funny faces. And I seem vaguely to be hearing them say the most ridiculous things, except that I do not catch the exact words. I have retraced most of my life, in an effort to determine when I could have seen such people. I have gone as far back as my seventeenth year, but without success.”

“Have you tried your childhood?” Mulden asked. “Tell me, when you were small, did you go to Punch-and-Judy shows, little Gagnols and the like?”

“Yes, Mulden.”

“And did you ever devote any of your attention to the so-called comic strips in the newspapers?”

“How extraordinary, Mulden! I did.”

“Well, then, you know what some Punch-and-Judy shows are like. All the characters are

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

ridiculous, they all have clubs, and they whack each other unmercifully. As for the comic strips, you know that they specialise in violence ; someone is always being kicked or clubbed, and the result is supposed to be amusing. Perhaps it is amusing, when confined to the limits of a tiny puppet-show or a strip in a newspaper. But suppose those characters should suddenly come to life, assume giant proportions, seize the world, and govern it with their clubs and slapsticks ? Suppose they caught the fever of nationalism ? Would it be very amusing for the rest of us ? ”

“ Can it be that that was where I had seen this government before ? ” I said

“ It might very well be,” said Mulden. “ Put it that all these strutting heroes, dictators and sub-dictators, not only in Bidlo but in other countries as well, are simply comic-strip and Punch-and-Judy characters who have broken loose from their appointed confines, have taken on life, size and power, and are overwhelming the world. It is, in short, a revolution of clowns who have gone into government, and who rule according to their

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

orthodox principles that a club and a beating solve all problems."

"What are we going to do about it?" I asked.

"What can we do? We cannot put them back into their puppet theatres or newspaper strips. But the troubling thing is that in spite of all our indignation at the savagery and cruelty of these characters we cannot get rid of the feeling that they are essentially comedians, although of a rudimentary sort"

"I do not welcome such a feeling," I said, "for I am terribly afraid that I have a sense of humour and it might weaken me. I do not want to regard dictators and their heroes as funny, even if they are."

"It really is dangerous to regard them as funny," said Mulden. "Winsatz, you know, was practically laughed into power. When he first appeared, a good many people found him so funny that his personality brightened their days with laughter. It was a mistake. They had no defence against him. Their laughter wore them out and exhausted them, but he was still funny."

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

They had to capitulate. And they've learned to their sorrow that humour is no protection against a clown with a political mission and a financial subsidy."

" I shall fight against my sense of humour," I said.

XV

I WAS preparing to go back to America and combat the notions of people who thought they wanted a dictator. But my departure from Bidlo was hastened by another event. Emma had declared war against me.

In the courts she had filed a petition to have me declared mentally incompetent. I was allowing my financial agent to do as he pleased, and the family fortune was endangered. What she had seen of me in Bidlo, what others had seen, what was reported in the press, proved that I was mentally incompetent. I spent great sums on statues and had gone mad on the subject of heroes and dictators. I deliberately had had myself incarcerated in a concentration camp. Were these the activities of a normal person? It was criminal for me to be at liberty, and for my riches to be dissipated.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

My fighting spirit was aroused and I determined to meet her challenge with militancy and reprisals. I would bring up the matter of her committees and ask the courts to decide whether Emma's activities were normal. I caught the first liner leaving Cherbourg. The reporters were at Quarantine when the ship arrived, but with the aid of my lawyer and a chartered tug I evaded them. "We will win," said the lawyer. "I can produce a dozen alienists who will prove you sane. As a matter of fact, I have succeeded in luring some of the best alienists out of your wife's camp. There was some lively bidding and it was expensive, but we will win."

The case went into its hearing. It happened that at the same time an investigation by Congress was in progress—an investigation of the activities of munitions firms. Officers of the companies were interrogated and the names of the principal holders of munitions stocks were revealed and published. Hodson had been very active. Industrials, forests in Brazil, rubber in Sumatra, Greta Garbo in Hollywood, had been exchanged

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

through the operations of the stock market for the most profitable investments of the hour—munitions. Hard pressed by the inquisitors, Hodson was forced to make known the identity of the principal for whom he was acting. It was revealed that I had become the principal individual stock-holder of the six largest armament combines of the world—American, British, French, German, Bidlite and Linkite. I had even invested heavily in the Bidlite and Linkite armament loans, the very ones which Kelsatz had offered me and which I had refused. All this without my knowledge.

Automatically I became the new “mystery man,” and I refused to talk. What infuriated me, however, were insinuations that my activities in Bidlo had really been in the interest of my stock holdings and that I was trying to promote another world war.

The case of my mental incompetence was quickly settled. It was obvious that anyone who made such good investments could not possibly be mentally incompetent. Emma's case collapsed.

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

Her defeat shocked her out of the control of twelve committees.

I was the new munitions king. The Zaharoff is dead ! Long live the Zaharoff ! Such courting as followed was too much for me. There were attacks, too, but these were dismissed as the ravings of malcontents. Mostly I was discussed and written about with awe, and described as a kindly gentleman with a love for flowers. Decorations poured in from all the countries of Europe. I sent them to Dayton Gibbs. There also came a letter from Winsatz Bidlo was at last ready to dedicate the statue I had presented ; would I come for the ceremonies ? Winsatz was anxious once again to have the benefit of my counsel. In my reply I referred him to Kelsatz, who would give him his instructions.

These sudden developments due to Hodson's activity were startling enough, but I was to learn that my agent had been energetic in other ways too. He was one of the principal organisers of a newly formed league of American business men. Their programme was that America needed a

CHOOSE A BRIGHT MORNING

Winsatz and they would try to provide one. I was furious with Hodson. There I was, back in America to fight that sort of thing, and my own agent had been working against me.

“Why have you done this?” I demanded.

He was somewhat taken aback, having expected hearty approval. “I saw it as part of my duty towards you,” he said. “I believed I was working in your best interests”

The day I learned of this, Hodson had brought to see me one of his associates in the league. In some vague way the associate reminded me of **Brunsat**z. I think it was a remark of his about the **little** children that made me think of the Propaganda Minister. He said his organisation, among other things, was preparing a campaign of political education for the little ones. “Without such instruction they are in danger,” he said. “They must be imbued with the old heroic spirit.”

“Moth balls,” I replied.

I saw a copy of Amy’s book about Bidlo and heroism. Twenty enthusiastic chapters, full of

CHGOLE A BRIGHT MORNING

descriptions of all the wonderful things she had seen in Bidlo.

But in a magazine I read a different sort of appraisal of Bidlo. One paragraph in particular held my attention. It stated: "Winsatz came to power in Bidlo as a slayer of dragons. But in order to slay the dragon he was obliged first to create it. He has created it. Bidlo is now one huge dragon. The nostrils from which it belches flame and smoke are the munitions factories through which Bidlo is preparing for war. Soon the dragon will come forth and send his destructive flames everywhere."

I mourned my lost innocence.

